



Parkland School Division
Pandemic Plan Overview
Parent / Guardian Edition
August 2009



Preamble

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a level six pandemic on June 11, 2009. H1N1 influenza outbreaks around the world have led to well over 180,000 cases. Of those 180,000 confirmed cases over 1,500 people have died.

Public Health Canada, Alberta Health Services and Emergency Management Alberta have developed plans and strategies for dealing with this pandemic influenza. The primary goal of these organizations is to reduce the number of influenza cases and minimize disruptions to daily life by providing access to appropriate prevention, care and treatment.

At this point, it is uncertain what level of support the federal, provincial and municipal governments will be able to provide to public institutions such as school boards. During this current pandemic, all levels of government are encouraging the public and private sector to educate their stakeholders on preventative strategies and to plan for business continuity, realizing that up to 25 to 35 percent of staff could be absent from the workforce. These plans also are to render these sectors' self-reliant during the pandemic phase, leaving government and health care organizations to address the distribution of vaccinations and care for the elderly and sick.

Alberta Health Services is responsible for taking the lead in an infectious disease emergency and will not recommend school closure unless school attendance is identified with the spread of influenza in its population. To prevent societal disruption, boards were advised to look at business continuity plans.

Given that public schools present many special challenges in containing communicable disease outbreaks, it is critical that Parkland School Division implement its pandemic response plan to support Alberta Health Services and the government's goal of minimizing serious illness and societal disruption.

This document contains general information regarding the current H1N1 pandemic and must be used in conjunction with the Hour Zero Emergency Plan Annex: Pandemic Planning.

Parkland School Division & the Influenza Pandemic

Parkland School Division is committed to the safety and well being of its school communities. During this time of crisis, this commitment does not waiver. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a level six pandemic in regards to the H1N1 influenza on June 11, 2009. It is anticipated that between 25 and 35 percent of Canadians will become ill with the influenza. Within Alberta, this percentage equates to 915,000 to 1.3 million Albertans falling ill, and within this group 9,000 to 13,000 requiring hospitalization.

All levels of government, including Alberta Health and Wellness are advising public and private entities enact their pandemic response plans for this outbreak, with the goal to reduce the number of influenza cases and to minimize disruptions to daily life. Parkland School Division is moving swiftly to respond to this advice.

Fundamental to this pandemic plan is the need to ensure stakeholders have a complete understanding of the pandemic influenza, the various roles governmental departments play and the expectations being placed on Parkland School Division and the communities it serves. To help build this understanding, Parkland offers the following summary of questions and answers that have arisen locally, provincially, nationally and internationally.



The Pandemic

What is a pandemic influenza and how does it differ from the seasonal influenza?

Every year, various strains of influenza virus circulate throughout the world, often causing local outbreaks. Albertans are infected by these different strains at multiple times during their life. Even though the virus may change slightly from year to year, most people will continue to have some protection against slightly changed viruses, particularly if they are immunized yearly.

Of the three influenza virus types (A, B and C), only type "A" causes pandemics. Three to four times each century a completely new strain of influenza type A virus emerges. If this new virus spreads easily from person to person, it could quickly travel around the world and cause serious illness and death for millions of people. This global epidemic is called pandemic influenza. A pandemic differs from the influenza we see every year in that everyone is at risk of infection with the new strain, larger numbers of people catch it, and the illness is more severe. Current vaccines will not offer protection.

What is H1N1 influenza?

H1N1 influenza virus is a new strain of the influenza virus which can be transmitted from person to person. New strains of seasonal influenza circulate every year in influenza season.

What does WHO raising the pandemic level to Phase 6 mean?

This in no way changes the level of preparedness the province already has in place. The Phase 6 designation is not indicative of how severe this disease is. It is a measure of where and how widespread this new virus has gone around the world. The risk level to the general public remains low.

How does the H1N1 influenza virus spread?

H1N1 influenza spreads the same way as seasonal influenza – from person to person through "droplets" that are released through the air when an infected person coughs and sneezes. The droplets can then be breathed in by others.

In addition, the virus can be contacted through shaking hands that are contaminated with the virus, or touching a hard surface, such as a counter or doorknob that has been contaminated with the virus. A person becomes infected by then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

What can people do to protect themselves from H1N1 influenza virus?

Individuals can take simple measures to minimize the risk of being infected.

Wash hands frequently using soap and water, especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.

Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth after shaking hands or touching hard surfaces like counters and door handles or other surfaces that may harbour influenza and other viruses.

Avoid close contact with people who are experiencing influenza-like symptoms.



What are the symptoms of H1N1 influenza virus?

The symptoms of H1N1 influenza virus in Canada have been generally mild and are similar to the symptoms of seasonal influenza. Symptoms may include:

- Fever;
- Cough;
- Fatigue;
- Muscle aches;
- Lack of appetite;
- Some people have also experienced runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

What is the incubation period for H1N1 influenza virus?

The incubation period is probably short; no longer than seven days.

How long is a person contagious if they develop H1N1 influenza?

The infectious period for a confirmed case of H1N1 influenza has been defined as one day prior to onset of illness to seven days after the onset of illness.

If you are sick with influenza-like illness, stay home for seven days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. Keep away from other household members as much as possible. This is to keep you from infecting others and spreading the virus further.

Is there a vaccine for H1N1 influenza virus?

No, at this time there is no vaccine available for H1N1 influenza virus. The seasonal influenza vaccine being used in Canada this year is not effective against this new strain of influenza.

Efforts are underway to develop a H1N1 influenza virus vaccine; however, it can take up to six months for a vaccine to be developed, tested and produced.

Could a pandemic be avoided?

Because the influenza virus is highly infectious and has a short incubation period, there is no way to prevent a pandemic.

Will sick children be allowed on buses?

This process has not changed with the current pandemic situation. Children that are visibly sick or confirmed as having H1N1 will not be allowed on buses with other students.

Alternative arrangements will be made with parents and/or guardians to ensure children get home from school.

The Pandemic at Home

What has been the effect of the current pandemic in Alberta?

As of August 19, 2009 there have been 1,648 confirmed cases of which seven have resulted in death.



Is Alberta ready for the pandemic?

In 1999, the Alberta government began work to prepare the health system and the province for a pandemic influenza. The plan was designed to act simultaneously with the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan. The goal of Alberta's plan is to reduce the number of influenza cases and minimize disruptions to daily life by providing access to appropriate prevention, care and treatment. Alberta's Pandemic Influenza Plan is divided into three phases: Pre-Pandemic Phase, Pandemic Phase and Post-Pandemic Phase.

Who is responsible for what under these plans?

An influenza pandemic is an international health event. International, federal, provincial and local agencies will work together to respond.

International:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) will continue to monitor the current outbreak of H1N1 throughout the world. As conditions change, it will notify federal health authorities and provide information to governments, the media and the public on immunization and anti-viral medication use.

Federal:

- Health Canada will provide nationwide coordination for the influenza response. They monitor the spread of the disease in Canada, provide links with the WHO and other nations, and obtain and distribute vaccines.
- The National Pandemic Influenza Committee with representation from provincial, territorial and the federal governments will coordinate a national influenza response.

Provincial:

- Alberta Health and Wellness will lead the health sector response. The Pandemic Response Centre will support coordination among regional health authorities, coordinate vaccine delivery across the province, provide information, collect data on the spread of the disease in Alberta and help resolve any health care issues that may arise.
- Alberta Municipal Affairs will lead the response regarding the non-health consequences of a pandemic, primarily through Emergency Management Alberta (EMA). EMA will communicate with municipalities, monitor the effect of the pandemic on essential services, coordinate volunteer activities and federal assistance programs and monitor the need for support among families of victims.
- Each provincial government department will have contingency plans for the delivery of provincial services, and will assist Alberta Health and Wellness, Emergency Management Alberta, regional health authorities and municipalities respond to a pandemic.

Local:

- Regional health authorities will provide services to meet priority health needs. In addition, they are providing information on the number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths from influenza; as the vaccines and anti-viral drugs become available they will co-ordinate the delivery.
- Regional health authorities will establish and maintain communications in their regions.
- Municipal governments will continue to set priorities for maintaining public safety and other essential public services (fire, police, waste management, water and utilities), support regional health authorities in providing information to the public and, where necessary, close public buildings and establish alternative care sites for the delivery of health care and immunization to the public.



How will vaccine be distributed?

Once available (November 2009), the federal government will secure supplies of vaccine and distribute them to provinces and territories on an equitable basis. In the case of a shortage of vaccine, the National Pandemic Influenza Committee has set priorities for which groups of the population will receive the vaccine first. Priority will be determined by Health Canada and Alberta Health and Wellness.

What has been done locally to prepare for the pandemic?

Parkland's health authority, Alberta Health Services, and municipalities have processes and plans to address the responsibilities assigned to them under Alberta's Pandemic Plan.

How will Parkland School Division respond?

Alberta Health Services is responsible for taking the lead in an infectious disease emergency and will not recommend school closure unless school attendance is identified with the spread of influenza in its population. Boards were advised to devise plans that would sustain educational services, given 25 to 35 percent of the population will fall ill to the influenza. Parkland School Division has developed and implemented a pandemic plan with specific procedures for each department within Parkland School Division.

These simple steps are the key to fighting a wide spread pandemic:

Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Good hand washing technique is easy to learn and can significantly reduce the spread of infectious diseases among both children and adults.

Sneeze and cough into your elbow or sleeve or use a tissue. After wiping or blowing your nose with a tissue, throw away the tissue and wash your hands. Keep your fingers away from your eyes, nose and mouth.

If you are sick, avoid going to work and being in large crowds as you can spread influenza easily to others. You should also visit those who are sick only if necessary.

Keep personal items separate if a household member is sick. Use a disinfectant to clean surfaces around a person who is sick with the influenza. Do not share personal items or drinks.