



PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PLAN

October 2009

Special thanks to the Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board and Halton District School Board for sharing the template for this plan.

This is a working document and it may be revised as required to respond to changing circumstances. It was developed to align pandemic planning across Bruce and Grey counties.

Introduction

Influenza has been with us for centuries. It causes severe illness and death every winter in North America, attacking the elderly and the debilitated with particular ferocity. Every winter, outbreaks of influenza in hospitals and long-term care homes require public health resources to control the spread and minimize the impact of influenza.

Outbreaks of influenza have been known to occur for centuries, and three influenza pandemics have occurred in the previous century alone - the Spanish (1918), Asian (1957) and Hong Kong (1968) pandemics. The Spanish pandemic, in two short years, killed an estimated 20 million people worldwide with some experts reporting deaths as high as 40 million. Entire towns were devastated and many families were wiped out as a result of influenza. Physicians tending to soldiers in military camps wrote letters home about young healthy men who came to the infirmary with a cough in the morning and were dead by nightfall. This virus quickly made its way around the globe.

Experts are predicting that another pandemic influenza will occur although the timing and pattern of the pandemic is unpredictable.

In terms of preparing for the impact of pandemic in the work environment, it has been projected that up to 30-35% of the workforce may be absent due to the effects of this virus on individuals and families. This clearly identifies the importance for the Board to prepare a plan to ensure continuity of essential services.

Bluewater District School Board could be faced with extremely high absenteeism rate during a pandemic influenza. For this reason, the Board is planning ahead to ensure we have the capacity to maintain service delivery during that time. Bluewater District School Board may also be asked to close schools to reduce the spread of influenza and health agencies may request the use of schools to act as temporary health facilities.

The World Health Organization identifies the following pandemic cycle:

World Health Organization Pandemic *Preparedness* Period

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| PHASE 1: <i>Probability of Pandemic - uncertain</i> | · No animal influenza virus circulating among animals has been reported to cause infection in humans. |
| PHASE 2: <i>Probability of Pandemic - uncertain</i> | · An animal influenza virus circulating in domesticated or wild animals is known to have caused infection in humans and is therefore considered a specific potential pandemic threat. |
| PHASE 3: <i>Probability of Pandemic - uncertain</i> | · An animal or human-animal influenza re-assortant virus has caused sporadic cases or small clusters of disease in people, but has not resulted in human-to-human transmission sufficient to sustain community-level outbreaks. |
| PHASE 4: <i>Probability of Pandemic - Medium to high</i> | · Human-to-human transmission of an animal or human-animal influenza re-assortant virus able to sustain community-level outbreaks has been verified. |
| PHASE 5: <i>Probability of Pandemic - High to certain</i> | · The same identified virus has caused sustained community level outbreaks in at least two countries in one WHO region. |

World Health Organization Pandemic *Response* Period

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| PHASE 6: <i>Pandemic in process</i> | · In addition to the criteria defined in Phase 5, the same virus has caused sustained community level outbreaks in at least one other country in another WHO region. |
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| <i>Post-Peak Period</i> | · Levels of pandemic influenza in most countries with adequate surveillance have dropped below peak levels. |
| <i>Possible new wave</i> | · Level of pandemic influenza activity in most countries with adequate surveillance is rising again. |
| <i>Post-Pandemic Period</i> | · Levels of influenza have returned to the levels seen for seasonal influenza in most countries with adequate surveillance. |

World Health Organization Pandemic *Response* Period

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| PHASE 7: | · Return to Pandemic Preparedness period |
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Information

The health and safety of staff and students will be closely monitored. If health and safety becomes a concern, the System Administrative Team will consider recommending the closure of specific sites in consultation with Public Health. It is also possible that the Medical Officer of Health may make recommendations regarding the closure of individual schools, or all schools.

It should be noted that while the schools are open during a declared pandemic, normal program expectations and service levels may not be met.

Operations - Organizational Structure

In the event of a pandemic being declared, the following organizational changes will be made.

1. The System Administrative Team will be responsible for directing the system on a day-to-day basis.
2. A special committee called the Operations Committee will be formed. The Operations Committee shall consist of the Director of Education, System Administrative Team Representative, Administrator of Employee Relations, Manager - Plant Services Operations, Health and Safety Officer, Managing Information for Student Achievement Leader and Communications Coordinator. It shall be the purpose of the Operations Committee to act as a resource and to make recommendations to the System Administrative Team.

The establishment of an Operations Committee will have the effect of centralizing operations. It will ensure that a highly structured and directed mode of operations be followed.

Role of the System Administrative Team

1. To direct the overall operation of the system.
2. To receive reports from the Operations Committee.
3. To make decisions as to the regional operation of the Board.
4. To review plans for the release of information as prepared by the Operations Committee and to authorize the sending of media releases.
5. To report to the Board as to the operation of the system.
6. To determine the closing of any school(s), in consultation with Public Health, due to excessive absenteeism.

Role of the Operations Committee

1. To monitor and make recommendations on the overall operation of the system on a daily basis.
2. To make a clear and complete assessment of situations that may arise in the region.
3. To act as a resource to the System Administrative Team.
4. To recommend courses of action to the System Administrative Team.
5. To help determine the substance of all news releases.
6. To act as an emergency resource for Area Superintendents, Principals and other Board personnel.

Operational Mode

1. By 12 noon each day, the Director of Education shall receive update absence reports from all schools/sites including absenteeism reports.
2. The Area Superintendents will make contact with schools, on a daily basis. It shall be their responsibility to ensure that there is always an Area Superintendent available to respond to an emergency situation.
3. Requests by the media will be referred to and received by the Director of Education. Schools will be closed to media.
4. In the event of an emergency situation arising, the System Administrative Team shall make decisions regarding requests for assistance.
5. By 2:00 p.m. each day, the Operations Committee will review the data that has been received. The Committee will make assessments of situations and will develop a series of recommendations for the System Administrative Team. In addition, news releases will be determined. The Committee shall decide how to handle specific requests by the media.

Information Items:

Intention:

It is our intention to conduct the affairs of the Bluewater District School Board in accordance with existing Board policies and operating procedures.

The following is for your information as to what the intention of the administration will be once a pandemic is declared. The intention is that:

1. Community Use of School Permits - existing/new permits for school facility use will be cancelled/not issued.
2. Board Meetings - Board meetings will be held as scheduled and more frequently if

necessary and may be held electronically.

3. Students with Special Needs - necessary to communicate from beginning to plan for safety of the students
4. Courier - will operate as usual.
5. Tragedy Response Team- response will be adjusted to fit the circumstances.
6. Essential Maintenance Services - sufficient contractors in the areas of heating, air conditioning and controls, electric, plumbing, public address systems, fire alarms, program bells, roofing, security alarms, snowplowing & sanding/salting, grass cutting, locksmith services are to be contracted or are currently contracted and we expect to have adequate resources in the event of any emergency which should be reported by the principal or designate to the Supervisor of Maintenance.
7. Extracurricular Activities - extracurricular activities will be cancelled.
8. Field Trips/Excursions - there will be a moratorium on field trips/excursions.
9. Food Programs – school based food programs will be cancelled.
10. Garbage Collection - the normal process for garbage collection will be maintained.
11. Home Instruction - home instruction will be cancelled.
12. Instruction/Evaluation/Reporting - where possible, the regular instructional program and those activities related to instruction, evaluation and reporting will continue.
13. Maintenance - the normal procedure shall continue, i.e. emergency calls will be directed to Maintenance Services. Maintenance items, which are not of an emergency nature, should be communicated to the Supervisor in the normal manner. Board staff and outside contractors will be used for all types of emergency maintenance and routine maintenance may be suspended.
14. Meetings - meetings that take administrators or staff out of school will be either cancelled or held by teleconference.
15. Occasional Teachers - school principals will be permitted to engage supply teachers who are from either the elementary or secondary occasional teacher list to ensure appropriate levels of coverage and supervision in schools.
16. Professional Development Activities - all professional development activities and attendance at conferences will be cancelled.
17. System Meetings - all system meetings will be cancelled.
18. School Community Councils - principals will have a plan for on-going communication with the Chair of their School Council. School Community Council and Parent Involvement Committee meetings at the school, regional or district level will be

cancelled.

19. Security of Facilities - while schools are open, security of facilities will continue in accordance with current procedures.
20. Student Transportation - subject to daily review, buses maintain regular schedules while schools remain open. However, the absenteeism level of bus drivers will jeopardize the operators ability to provide adequate level of service.
21. Supplies Orders - the normal process for order and delivery of supplies will be maintained.
22. Volunteers - the present practice regarding volunteers in our schools will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Community Plan for Pandemic Preparedness Contingency

Background

A pandemic is any infectious disease that spreads rapidly throughout the population. Experts cannot predict when the next pandemic might occur, but historically pandemics occur three to four times each century. A likely form of pandemic might be influenza - pandemic flu is a new highly infectious viral respiratory illness that occurs when a new strain of the influenza virus appears and spreads quickly around the world. Pandemic flu will spread more quickly than seasonal flu because humans will have little or no immunity to this new virus. Experts say that up to 25-35 per cent of the population may get pandemic flu at some point.

Our stakeholders will want evidence that we are well prepared in the event of a pandemic. It is not enough to say we have a plan - we must share all aspects of our plan widely with all stakeholders in an open, transparent way if we want to gain their confidence and trust.

Strategic Considerations

- We are not doctors. We must rely on the advice and direction of provincial public health officials in the event of a pandemic. Decisions about closing schools for health reasons (as opposed to safety issues due to insufficient staff to provide adequate supervision) must be made by public health officials, not our Board.
- It is vital to recognize that nothing is more important to parents than the well-being of their children. Parents will not hesitate to keep their children home from school if they perceive a possible threat to their children's health. They tend to be skeptical of "experts" who tell them it is safe for their children to be in school - they seek alternate sources of information and will question how we can "guarantee" that their child will not suffer any health effects.
- Public reaction will be divided between those who will think we are not doing enough to protect the safety of staff and students and those who think we are over-reacting. All of our decisions are completely open to public scrutiny and criticism. Despite the extremes of public opinion, our goal is to make sure our stakeholders are informed about our plan and our contingency actions - whether or not they agree with them.
- Health and safety concerns can quickly create widespread panic among a group, if not managed well. Once people are panicked, providing them with information may no longer be sufficient to help them feel they are safe - even though all the evidence may support a finding that the school/workplace is safe to occupy, there is a portion of any population who will remain resistant to reassurance.

Communication Key Messages

- The Board will follow the advice and guidance of provincial and local public health officials who have the expertise to assess the level of health risk posed by a specific situation.
- The Board priority is to keep schools open as long as it is safe to do so. Non-essential services will be halted to focus on providing the most necessary services to our community.

Communication Strategies

Stage 1: Preparing for contingency

Communicate the Board's pandemic preparedness plan widely to all stakeholders.

- Create a new section on our website which will contain information about the board's pandemic plan.
- Communicate to all employees to inform them about the pandemic plan.
- Create a summary fact sheet about the pandemic plan, Q&A and other background material
- Communicate the Board's pandemic plan to all other community partners including bus companies, local parishes and the co-terminus Board
- Provide information to the Parent Involvement Committee

Stage 2: Pandemic is confirmed outside of Canada

After consulting with public health authorities to gain reassurances that there is no imminent health concern in Grey and Bruce, the Board would continue to use all of the communication strategies from phase 1 to reassure staff, parents and other stakeholders. Use the heightened interest to make sure stakeholders understand the Board's contingency plan and how they can gain information. Emphasize awareness of the services that have been identified as essential during a pandemic, and those that would be curtailed during contingency.

Communicating with Staff

- Cascade of meetings to ensure face-to-face communication with all staff.
 - Area Superintendents meet with their administrators, providing information about the information received from public health authorities. Explain that if there is a confirmed case of pandemic in Ontario, the Board will go into contingency. Explain how schools will operate during contingency.
 - Provide scripts and handouts for administrators to use in conducting meetings of all

- staff, so they can deliver the same consistent message to all staff at their location.
- Bluewater Education Centre to hold staff meetings to provide information about how each department will operate during contingency. Managers/Supervisors hold meetings if necessary to make sure all staff receive messages face to face.
- All meetings will emphasize the message that, in the event of contingency, the Board expects staff to come to work if they are well, unless public health authorities or the Board close their school/worksites. Provide staff with direction about how to find out if their school or worksite is open or closed (website, school's voice mail, emergency call-out).
- Set up briefing with Union Presidents. The System Administrative Team representative will be the main contact between the Operations Committee and the Unions. The Unions will receive a daily update following the Operations Committee, and will direct all major questions/concerns through this individual to the Operations Committee. Keep in constant contact to identify staff concerns, questions.

Communicating with Parents and the Public

- Update website to provide most current information.
- Provide all schools with a parent communication. Use this letter to reinforce information sources and remind them of essential services.
- Send background information to all media, informing them that the Bluewater District School Board will go into contingency if there is a confirmed case of pandemic in Ontario and informing them of how the board will operate in contingency.

Stage 3: Pandemic is confirmed in Ontario

In the event that public health authorities confirm a pandemic in Ontario, the Bluewater District School Board will go into contingency.

Communicating with Staff

- Email all staff informing them that the Board is now in contingency. Inform them of the public health guidance the Board has received. Remind them of the main ways that the Board will function during contingency - e.g. what essential services will continue and what activities will be curtailed. Remind them of information sources. Remind them that the Board expects them to come to work if they are well, unless public health authorities or the Board close schools or worksites. Remind staff how to find out if their school/worksites is open or closed (website or school voice mail).
- Provide script, Q&A and other background to principals and supervisors to be shared with staff. Ask them to feed back questions and concerns they are receiving, through their Area Superintendent or Supervisor, to Operations Committee, so they can be added to the Questions & Answers.
- Staff will use BEAM First Class as their main information sources. Daily updates will be

posted after the Operations Committee meeting.

Communication with Parents

- Send home letter to parents, explaining that the Board is now in contingency.
 - letter explains main ways to get information - website, school voice mail, radio
 - remind parents of essential services that will continue in schools and those that will be cancelled
 - emphasize that, if they are well, students are expected to come to school unless public health authorities or the Board close schools
 - emphasize key message that students who are ill should remain at home
 - direct parents to check website or Board voice mail daily for information about any bus cancellations
 - explain that field trips, excursions, food programs will be cancelled during contingency and let them know they will receive specific information from their school about refunds/rescheduling (probably after contingency is over)
- Use website as main information source for parents and the community about the status of schools.
 - website listing of all schools with status (open or closed) will be updated daily or as needed
 - daily updates will be posted following Operations Committee
- Provide schools with standard signage - “School is open” or “School is closed” to be posted on the school exterior each day to help communicate with parents.
- Provide schools with voice mail scripts to use on their school answering machine to provide parents and staff with the information about the status of their school.
- Provide schools with scripts for secretaries on a daily basis, or as necessary, to answer parent questions regarding contingency.

Community Organizations and Media

- Send information out to all Community users indicating permits are cancelled until further notice.
- Post information on website about all other cancellations.
- Email information to complete list of community organizations informing them that the Board is in contingency, outlining essential services that will continue, and directing them to the Board website.
- Email information to all Board vendors for whom the Board has contact information.
 - inform them that the Board is in contingency
 - outline the main essential services that will continue and those that will be cancelled
 - explain how the contingency might affect vendors

- Prepare daily update for media. Distribute to media and post on website. Schools will be closed to media.
- Hold media briefings or news conferences, if needed, to share significant news.
- Contact all child care providers. Provide them with a main Board contact for them to direct questions/concerns.

Communication with Trustees

- Trustees will receive, by email, daily updates following Operations Committee. Regular Board meetings will be conducted by telephone while the Board is in contingency, unless otherwise determined jointly by the Director of Education and the Chair of the Board.

Resources:

[Grey Bruce Health Unit](#)

[Grey Bruce Public Health Unit Pandemic Preparedness Checklist](#)

[Public Health Agency for Canada, Pandemic Influenza Plan](#)

[World Health Organization, Pandemic Preparedness](#)

[Halton Region Health Department, Business Continuity Tool Kit](#)