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**PANDEMIC PLANNING IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS**

PRESENTED TO THE FORT SASKATCHEWAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

DOW CENTENNIAL CENTRE  
LIONS MANE BANQUET ROOM  
8700 84 STREET  
FORT SASKATCHEWAN

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2009  
12:00 P.M.

## **INTRODUCTION**

- **Hello everyone, and thank you for inviting me here today to speak about our ongoing planning for H1N1, or Pandemic bracket (H1N1) bracket 2009 as our clinicians call it.**
- **First of all, I would like to commend all of you for your interest in learning how to develop a pandemic plan for your business. Health promotion is a key component of our health strategy, and educating people on how to protect themselves against becoming ill is a big part of that.**
- **I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the sponsor of today's event, the Fort Saskatchewan Community Hospital Foundation. Their fundraising efforts will help to provide equipment and facilities that will elevate care to a higher level for all Fort Saskatchewan and area residents.**
- **On behalf of Alberta Health Services, I would like to thank the Foundation for their efforts, and wish them all the best in their fundraising endeavors.**

- **And of course, I would like to congratulate those who were voted in as directors of the Chamber of Commerce today. I wish you the best of luck moving forward.**
- **I imagine you have come prepared with many questions, but I would prefer that you wait until the end of my speech to ask them. I'll be happy to answer them at that time.**

### **INTRO TO PANDEMIC INFLUENZA A 2009**

- **With flu season right around the corner, it is highly likely Alberta and the rest of Canada will experience an escalation in the number of cases this fall.**
- **Alberta Health Services is committed to taking swift action to successfully address the variety of current and future risks facing our province.**
- **As you are well aware, H1N1 continues to spread worldwide.**
- **Recently I have been teleconferencing with my colleagues in Australia , to learn more about their experiences with H1N1,**

**and what potential impact a pandemic will have on our hospitals, for example. Or the need to provide consistent information to the public as quickly as possible, and the risk of under or overestimating the threat presented by H1N1.**

- **I hope by sharing our information and experiences, we can help each other develop the best possible response to any pandemic, including H1N1. I look forward to speaking with my colleagues again later this month to further discuss ways to deal with H1N1.**

## **SO WHAT IS AHS DOING?**

- **With all the coverage of H1N1 in the news, it might seem that pandemic planning has only been going on the past few months. In fact health providers have been preparing the system and the province for a pandemic since the mid nineties.**
- **Health planning and preparedness in the event of a pandemic is coordinated by Alberta Health and Wellness, and involves a range of partners, including other provincial ministries, Alberta Health Services, municipalities, municipal essential services, utility and transportation**

**companies and professional organizations.**

- **Alberta's response plan will be used in co-ordination with municipal plans, pre-existing health authority plans and the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector, which was prepared by a partnership of federal, provincial and territorial governments.**
- **In the event of any pandemic, Alberta Health Services will provide services to meet priority health needs.**
- **We are continually monitoring the status of H1N1. Depending on its severity, we may need to alter our current budget strategies for reducing costs in the health care system in order to ensure we are fully prepared to deal with the pandemic.**
- **First and foremost, our pandemic plan continues to focus on prevention, including basic steps of washing one's hands frequently and staying home when sick. This is key in preventing the spread of any virus or infection, including H1N1.**

- **Vaccination will be another method to protect ourselves against the pandemic. The H1N1 vaccine is currently going through clinical trials, and we anticipate by November we will be in a position to start vaccinating Albertans.**
- **We will have vaccination clinics around the province to help respond to H1N1, including two recently leased sites in Calgary—Brentwood Village and Avenida Village.**
- **These and other clinics will provide a safe, accessible and established environment for Albertans to receive their immunizations, and help prevent overcrowding at other AHS facilities.**
- **As we get closer to the release of the vaccine, we will do our best to promote it and encourage as many Albertans as possible to receive their immunizations.**
- **That said, prevention and vaccination are only a part of our pandemic plan. We are continually revising our plan to ensure all outcomes relating to a pandemic are covered.**

- **For example, as the pandemic escalates and there are lots of people sick, the health system won't necessarily work the way it usually does.**
- **During a pandemic, demand for health services could threaten to exceed the availability of our resources. Higher rates of infection would increase the pressure on our emergency rooms, as well as medical equipment such as ventilators.**
- **To mitigate these risks, Alberta Health Services recently purchased 106 ventilator units for space being developed at the Foothills Medical Centre's McCaig Tower and new construction at the Peter Lougheed Centre. The purchase was completed ahead of schedule to enable deployment of these units to areas of need across the province if necessary during the upcoming flu season.**
- **The total cost for these ventilators was \$3.9 Million, which I am happy to report came in \$2.0 million under budget, due to the offer of a 3-year province-wide contract. The funds for this purchase came from the pre-existing project**

**equipment budgets.**

- **Representatives from critical care in Edmonton and Respiratory Services Strategies gathered with their colleagues in Calgary to review the offers and come to consensus on province-wide awards.**
- **The ventilator manufacturing and delivery process is being closely monitored, and delivery will commence on September 15th. We expect the final units to arrive on October 9th.**
- **We placed the order about four weeks ago, so there was about a eight – nine week lag between ordering and final delivery. This shows the importance of early planning.**
- **I also mentioned that an increase in H1N1 cases will put more pressure on our emergency rooms across the province.**
- **We will also explore the option of scaling back non-essential work, for example, by delaying elective surgery to free up staff and resources to handle H1N1 cases.**

- **Everyone at Alberta Health Services knows we may call on them to “step up” and take on additional duties related to our planning and response. H1N1 will be our primary focus for the immediate future.**
- **At a higher level, we have created the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Steering Committee and Structure, which is actively recommending strategies and solutions to the many challenges and issues that lie ahead.**
- **The Steering Committee is composed of nine sections of AHS that are responsible for key areas requiring immediate and ongoing attention.**
- **Each section is further divided into working groups which focus on the priority issues; address questions as they arise or are posed by our staff, patients and the public; and develop clear recommendations and solutions based on the best evidence available and the expertise of our staff.**
- **The AHS Executive now gets a report on H1N1 preparedness every week.**

- **We are engaging all levels of our organization to contribute in pandemic planning, from senior leadership to the front-line. Several of Alberta Health Services' senior leaders, managers and clinicians are leading major areas of work relating to pandemic planning and response.**
- **We are prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure the health and well being of Albertans, including providing the necessary information during a pandemic. Where and how you can access facilities, receive vaccinations, the total number of H1N1 cases and hospitalizations, and so on.**
- **We want to help communities be more prepared for an influenza pandemic. Later this month, we're beginning a series of presentations across the province to do just that.**
- **The first stop will be northern Alberta, where a team of local medical officers of health and emergency preparedness experts will provide advice on preparing for a pandemic.**
- **These presentations are intended for municipalities, schools, business, and non-governmental organizations, which aim to inform partners and build and maintain relationships.**

- **By sharpening up local plans, we can strengthen working arrangements not only between AHS and our partners, but also those between partners such as municipal governments and local business.**
- **Materials from the presentation have been distributed throughout AHS facilities in northern Alberta and will also be used throughout the province in similar forums in the coming months.**
- **We have also developed many H1N1 resources that can be found on our website, [albertahealthservices.ca](http://albertahealthservices.ca). There you can find general information on H1N1, as well as more specific information for the public, schools, health professionals and private businesses.**
- **While I will cover some of that material today, I encourage you to visit our website and take a look at those resources. They will definitely help you in your own pandemic planning.**

## **WHAT BUSINESSES CAN DO**

- **You probably noticed that the title of my presentation is “Pandemic planning is everybody’s business.” The effectiveness of a pandemic influenza response is not the responsibility of any single person or organization.**
- **Everyone, including businesses, has a role to play and can make a huge contribution to pandemic planning.**
- **We have a plan and you all play a part in it. We want Albertans to ask themselves how does our plan fit with theirs, and how can they be ready as an organization or as an individual.**
- **As you are probably well aware, the first thing businesses need to understand is the impact a pandemic can have on your day-to-day operations.**
- **Imagine the challenges you might face if even a quarter of your employees can’t work because they are sick or caring for a family member who has fallen ill.**

- **On top of that, other businesses you rely on are facing the same absentee rates and goods and services you need from other countries are not available.**
- **As with any major issue, communicate with and educate your staff. Make them aware of the threat of pandemic influenza and the steps you are taking to prepare for it. Studies show that employees show an increased tendency to listen to their employer during emergencies, so clear and frequent communication is essential.**
- **The best way for you to navigate a pandemic is through prevention and education. Just as our pandemic plan has a focus on prevention, yours should too.**
- **The first step of your plan should be protecting your employees' health.**
- **You can create a healthy work environment by encouraging healthy behaviours at all times. Posting tips on how to stop the spread of germs at work by washing your hands and sneezing into your upper sleeve, for example, is an excellent**

**preventative measure.**

- **There is also the matter of staff coming to work when they are sick. I know in today's society we seem to have a "tough it out" philosophy, but people coming to work while ill is a surefire way to get the entire office sick.**
- **Your staff need to be reassured that it is okay, and actually better, that they stay home when they are experiencing flu-like symptoms.**
- **If your staff are determined to continue working, consider providing them with the tools they need to work from home – such as remote access to their office computer, for example.**
- **Identify your company's essential functions and the individuals who perform them. The absence of these individuals could seriously impair your ability to do business. Cross-train your employees to ensure all the essential functions can continue in the event of a high absentee rate.**

- **Also, be sure to check your current emergency plans to ensure they are applicable to a pandemic. Specifically, check to see you can maintain your core business functions over a period of weeks.**
- **Determine which external activities are critical to maintaining your business operations, and develop alternatives in case they cannot function normally. For example, what transportation systems are needed to provide essential materials? Does your inventory need to be re-supplied constantly, or is there usually a reserve?**
- **Plan accordingly for possible short interruptions of essential services like sanitation, water, power, and disruptions to the food supply.**
- **And of course, we recommend you encourage your staff to vaccinate themselves against H1N1 and seasonal influenza. Alberta Health Services will inform you when and where you can obtain these vaccinations as they become available.**
- **These are only a few things you can do to prepare for a pandemic; you can find much more information on our**

website.

- **Rest assured, however – you will definitely not be left to your own devices during a pandemic. Health officials and all levels of government will work together to provide you with the most up to date information and recommendations possible. Be sure you and your staff pay close attention to the guidance provided.**

## **CONCLUSION**

- **This pandemic may very well be the greatest clinical challenge our young organization has faced to date. I am confident we will meet that challenge, and come through it a better organization.**
- **As I mentioned early on, our primary focus right now is indeed pandemic planning – but that doesn't mean we are stopping our work in other areas.**
- **While we improve access to prepare for the increased demand a pandemic will bring, it is important for us to ensure all Albertans, young and old, have access to the right care in the right place.**

- **In the near future you will hear more about Alberta Health Services' plans to serve the needs of Albertans with the right balance of community-based care, acute care and physician care.**
- **On that note, I would like to again thank you for having me here today, and now open the floor to your questions and comments. END**