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3. Public Health Measures

Public health measures are non-pharmaceutical interventions used to reduce the spread of disease. They include providing public education, conducting case and contact management, closing schools, limiting public gatherings, issuing travel restrictions and screening travellers. The type of public health measures used and the timing depend on the epidemiology of the virus (clinical severity and transmissibility of the virus). A key characteristic of public health measures is that they are implemented in non-health settings (i.e. workplace, home, civic spaces, educational settings, community-based social service organizations, etc.). (NOTE: when these measures are used in health settings, they are termed ‘infection prevention and control measures’.)

3.1 Objectives

The objectives for Peterborough County and City are as follows:

1. To decrease the number of individuals exposed to the novel virus and potentially slow the progress of the pandemic;
2. To reduce illness and death caused by the pandemic; and
3. To slow pandemic spread and gain time for implementing medical measures.

3.2 Voluntary and Mandatory Public Health Measures

Some public health measures are required under the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA) and other provincial and federal legislation (mandatory). Other measures are considered best practice, but do not have the weight of legislation backing them (voluntary).

Mandatory public health measures include case and contact management, orders and travel restrictions. The Medical Officer of Health (MOH) for the City and County of Peterborough has the authority to implement public health measures under the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA). The decision to use a particular public health measure will be made by the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario after consultation with local medical officers of health and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC). This will ensure consistency across Ontario. It will also instill public confidence and compliance and reduce confusion. The timing of instituting these public health measures may vary from health units to health units depending on the severity of the pandemic in each part of the province. The decision to use public health measures will be triggered by the epidemiology of the pandemic strain and the phase of the pandemic.

Section 3: Public Health Measures

Voluntary public health measures include:

- Behaviours
 - Hand hygiene
 - Respiratory etiquette
 - Environmental cleaning
 - Illness isolation
 - Social distancing
 - Closures of organizations or programs
- Environmental supports (equipping non-health organizations and the public with the supports they need to implement voluntary public health measures)
 - Information (i.e. why measures are important, disease process, etc.)
 - Support (i.e. flexibility with sick leave)
 - Role modeling (i.e. leaders adapting voluntary health measures)

The types of public health measures used during an influenza pandemic and their timing will depend on:

- the epidemiology of the virus (e.g., pathogenicity, mode(s) of transmission, incubation period, attack rate in different age groups, period of communicability, susceptibility to antivirals);
- the characteristics of the community (i.e., some measures, such as school closures, are more effective in rural than in urban areas);
- the effect on the needs of the vulnerable populations (group of people, who, because of the determinants of health, are:
 - more likely to be exposed to influenza;
 - more likely to experience a serious impact because of exposure;
 - less likely to benefit from response and recovery measures; and/or
 - negatively affected by response and recovery measures;
- public acceptance of the measures;
- the resources required to implement the measures (i.e., some measures, such as tracing contacts and active surveillance, are labour intensive and may not be an effective use of resources once the virus is wide spread in the community); and/or
- the amount of social disruption the measure will cause (for example, the decision to cancel public transit services would be so disruptive; it is unlikely to be used).