

**Report to  
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health  
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa  
16 September 2019 / le 16 septembre 2019**

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**Submitted by  
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**Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE      File Number: ACS2019-OPH-HPP-0007**

**SUBJECT: OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH'S 2019/2020 INFLUENZA SEASON  
UPDATES**

**OBJET: SANTÉ PUBLIQUE OTTAWA – COMPTE RENDU SUR LA SAISON  
GRIPPALÉ 2019-2020**

#### **REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit receive, for information, the 2019/2020 influenza season update, as outlined in this report.**

#### **RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa prenne connaissance du compte rendu sur la saison grippale 2019-2020 figurant dans le présent rapport.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Influenza is a contagious respiratory infection caused primarily by influenza A and B viruses. In Canada, influenza generally occurs each year in the late fall and winter months. During the 2018-2019 influenza season there were 1,134 cases of influenza and 18 influenza-related deaths reported to Ottawa Public Health (OPH). Most influenza infection is never laboratory-confirmed or reported as up to 8% of the population may be infected each season. During the 2018-2019 influenza season, OPH administered more than 9,400 doses of flu vaccine, distributed 267,314 doses of flu vaccine to community health care providers, and supported distribution of vaccine to community pharmacists.

This report highlights what is new and upcoming for the 2019-2020 influenza season in OPH's work to protect residents from influenza through: health promotion and prevention activities like immunization clinics and comprehensive communication plans; health protection strategies to monitor, respond to and manage disease outbreaks; and surveillance of influenza to monitor disease activity in Ottawa in order to respond to any increase in influenza activity.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

La grippe est une infection respiratoire contagieuse causée principalement par les virus de la grippe A et de la grippe B. Au Canada, les cas de grippe surviennent généralement chaque année à la fin de l'automne et durant l'hiver. Au terme de la saison grippale 2018-2019, on avait signalé à Santé publique Ottawa (SPO) 1 134 cas de grippe et 18 décès attribuables à celle-ci. SPO a administré plus de 9 400 doses de vaccin contre la grippe – 30 % de plus que durant la saison grippale précédente –, distribué 267 314 doses à des fournisseurs de soins de santé communautaires et participé à la distribution de vaccins aux pharmaciens communautaires.

Le présent rapport fait état des changements prévus cette saison par SPO dans son travail pour protéger les résidents de la grippe, qui passe par : les initiatives de promotion de la santé, comme des cliniques d'immunisation et des plans de communication exhaustifs; les stratégies de protection de la santé en vue du suivi et de la prise en charge des éclosions dans la collectivité; la surveillance de l'activité grippale dans le but de réagir aux éventuelles hausses.

## **BACKGROUND**

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) continuously monitors cases of infectious diseases of public health significance, including influenza. OPH responds to and manages reports of

respiratory outbreaks and works to improve access to immunization to provide protection against vaccine preventable illnesses.

Influenza is a contagious respiratory infection caused primarily by influenza A and B viruses. In Canada, influenza occurs each year in the late fall and winter season. The best way to protect residents against influenza is through immunization. The seasonal influenza vaccine should be administered as soon as possible once available in the fall, since seasonal influenza activity may start as early as November in the Northern Hemisphere<sup>1</sup>.

Every year OPH participates in Ontario's Universal Influenza Immunization Program (UIIP). The UIIP provides publicly-funded influenza vaccine for all individuals aged 6 months or older who live, work or attend school in Ontario.<sup>2</sup> Through this program influenza vaccine is available across the City of Ottawa in pharmacies (for those 5 years of age and older), workplaces, OPH clinics, community health centres, physician and nurse practitioner offices, and long-term care and acute care facilities. In June and September of 2017, the Board received updates on the [multi-phase immunization strategy](#), including updates to the universal influenza programming, highlighting strategies focused on the delivery of immunization services to meet the needs of residents who are facing barriers to accessing vaccine.

Influenza activity in the 2018/2019 influenza season was lower than the 2017/2018 season. In Ottawa during the 2018/2019 influenza season, there were 1,134 cases of influenza (691 lab-confirmed cases) and 18 influenza-related deaths reported to OPH, compared to 2241 cases of influenza (1181 lab-confirmed cases) and 28 deaths in the 2017/2018 season.<sup>3</sup> Most influenza infection is never laboratory-confirmed or reported as up to 8% of the population may be infected each season.<sup>4</sup> Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 was the predominant circulating subtype, followed by a smaller late-season wave of influenza A(H3N2). There were 38 influenza A outbreaks and 3 influenza B outbreaks reported to OPH by long-term care homes and retirement homes, affecting 524 residents and staff (81 of whom were also lab-confirmed cases).

In the 2018/2019 season, OPH administered more than 9,400 doses of flu vaccine, an increase of 30 percent from the previous flu season. OPH also directly distributed 267,314 doses of flu vaccine to community health care providers, also an increase of 30 percent from the previous flu season and supported distribution of 157,850 doses to community pharmacists through cold chain inspections of Ministry-approved pharmacies, temperature log monitoring and follow-up on reports of cold chain breaks.

Influenza vaccination rates are moderately high among older Ottawa adults. During the 2018/2019 influenza season, 86% of residents 65 years of age and older reported receiving an influenza vaccination, while close to half (46%) of residents aged 18 to 64 years reported receiving an influenza vaccination, similar to previous influenza seasons for both age groups.<sup>5</sup> However, influenza vaccination coverage among adults aged 18 to 64 years with at least one chronic medical condition\* was low at 50% compared to the national goal of 80%.<sup>6</sup>

In preparation for the 2019/2020 influenza season, OPH has been monitoring several issues that may affect residents:

#### a) Vaccine Supply & Availability

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides annual recommendations for the composition of the influenza vaccine for the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. This year the recommendation for the Northern Hemisphere vaccine was delayed by one month, which may have implications for vaccine supply and timely availability. The Ministry of Health has indicated that vaccine for clients at high-risk for complications of influenza infection will be available in October and vaccine for the general public in early November.

The Ministry has notified public health units about different availability of forms of influenza vaccine previously available. The “FluMist<sup>®</sup>” nasal spray will be unavailable in Canada for this upcoming season. This vaccine had been distributed in previous flu seasons (starting in 2015) as a vaccine option for children and youth 2 to 17 years of age. The lack of the “FluMist<sup>®</sup>” vaccine may increase client distress for those who have difficulty with injections. The quadrivalent influenza vaccine (IIV-4) will be publicly-funded for everyone over 6 months of age. The IIV-4 provides protection against four strains of influenza, including two influenza A strains and two influenza B strains.

High-dose trivalent vaccine (IIV-3 HD) “Fluzone<sup>®</sup> High Dose” will continue to be publicly funded for adults 65 years of age and older. This vaccine provides protection against two influenza A strains and one B strain and contains four times as much antigen compared to IIV-4 for the three strains the vaccines share in common. The IIV-3 HD vaccine has been shown to provide superior protection for adults over 65 years of age compared to the standard dose trivalent vaccine. As in previous years the high dose

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\* Chronic medical conditions assessed in the survey include: asthma, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, kidney or liver disease, blood-related disorder, cancer, or immunodeficiency

vaccine will be available through the health unit and regular health care providers. It is not yet known if high dose vaccine will be available through pharmacies.

#### b) Disease Prevalence

It is not possible to predict with any certainty the start, peak, intensity, duration, severity or circulating strains for the upcoming influenza season.<sup>7</sup> The influenza season typically begins in Ottawa in mid-November, about a month after the vaccine normally becomes available, and ends in early spring. However, with the potential of a vaccine distribution delay from the province, it is possible that the 2019-2020 influenza season may arrive prior to the vaccine's availability. As with all influenza seasons, OPH will continue to monitor influenza activity and respond promptly to early signs of an increase in activity should it occur.

### **DISCUSSION**

OPH is a key driver in influenza response in the Ottawa community and across the health care system. OPH's efforts focus on health promotion and prevention, protection, surveillance, and the coordination of activities with stakeholders to reduce the associated burden particularly on primary, acute and long-term care facilities. OPH's influenza plan for the 2019/2020 season aligns with the strategic direction to drive prevention in the health care system and is detailed below.

#### **Health Promotion and Prevention Strategies for the 2019/2020 Influenza season**

OPH focuses on preventing the spread of influenza by increasing access to and promoting immunization, and encouraging infection prevention strategies such as hand hygiene, to limit the spread of the disease.

Immunization services: OPH immunization clinics are prioritized to be located in geographical areas, and for particular populations in Ottawa, with less access to the flu vaccine. These areas include rural communities and areas of the city not serviced by pharmacies for influenza vaccination. Clinics are also targeted to populations at high-risk of complications from influenza and/or at highest risk of transmitting influenza, which includes people in chronic care facilities, young children and older adults and those with difficulty accessing health services such as marginalized populations<sup>1</sup>. Focusing efforts in this way is consistent with the [Vaccinate Ottawa Together](#) strategy, presented to the Board in June 2018, and the goals of Phase 2 of the [Immunization Multi-Phase Strategy](#) presented to the Board in June 2015, which aims to increase access to immunizations for residents in Ottawa facing barriers in accessing vaccines.

- Ottawa Public Health Community clinics will be held in the rural communities of West Carleton, South Carleton, Metcalfe and North Gower, at four clinic locations that enable access for families of young children in Leitrim, Orleans, Barrhaven and Kanata, and at two clinics locations that reach older adults in downtown Ottawa and Stittsville. (See Document 1).
- OPH will continue to offer daily booked appointments for families with children under 5 years of age at 100 Constellation and at monthly roving clinics situated throughout the City of Ottawa.
- OPH will provide approximately 20 outreach clinics to group homes, residences, shelters and rooming houses.
- Health unit-driven clinics will be offered in Aging in Place buildings, hospital community clinics at Queensway-Carleton Hospital, The Royal, CHEO, Hôpital Montfort and Perley-Rideau Veterans' Health Care Centre, and 8 additional outreach clinics in shelters and through the Sexual Health Clinic and mobile Site Van.

Improvements to clinic offerings this year will include strategies to reduce wait times and an increase in the number of OPH driven clinics to improve vaccine access.

Communications: As part of OPH's comprehensive influenza communication plan for the 2019/2020 season, communications products will include the following: web-based seasonal influenza information for the general public and for health care professionals; on [ottawapublichealth.ca](http://ottawapublichealth.ca) and [parentinginottawa.ca](http://parentinginottawa.ca), local media relations; targeted social media strategies, including those for Twitter & Facebook; public poster and newspaper campaigns; and regular communications and updates to healthcare providers and partners.

The key objectives of the 2019/2020 Flu Communications Plan for the public are:

- To inform residents regarding where to obtain the flu vaccine, which vaccines are available and to increase the number of Ottawa residents who get their flu shot once the vaccines are available.
- To inform residents about how to reduce the spread of infections through hand hygiene with the Ottawa's Health is in Your Hands (OHiiYH) campaign. Complementing health promotion activities promoting vaccination, OPH's OHiiYH campaign highlights hand washing/hygiene as the single most important intervention for stopping the spread of infections. In addition, messaging also

highlights the importance of cough etiquette and staying home when sick as key measures to decrease transmission of infection.

### **Health Protection Strategies for Influenza 2019/2020 season**

OPH receives reports of, and responds to, influenza outbreaks as they occur. OPH continues to promote influenza prevention and protection strategies within settings at risk for outbreaks. During outbreaks, OPH employees aim to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of infection prevention and control measures to improve health outcomes for residents. These strategies include new initiatives as well as on-going/continued outbreak management processes proven to be effective, such as using a risk-based approach and surge capacity planning.

Risk-based approach: New this year, OPH's Infection Prevention and Control Inspection and Investigation (IPAC I&I) Team has developed an evidence-informed risk-based approach to the management of outbreaks in healthcare and other facilities that prioritizes the needs of partners, as well as identifies the facilities most in need of public health resources. As part of this approach, OPH will tailor tools and interventions for facilities that have a history of problematic outbreaks (e.g. high morbidity/mortality, hospitalizations, low immunization rates, etc.). Pre-season outbreak preparedness and response activities, including on-site assessments, will focus on institutions serving people at higher risk for complications of influenza infection, including shelters and residential facilities.

OPH's risk-based strategy includes education/training, meetings with Directors of Care/management and on-site involvement that focuses on the provision of tools and resources to ensure high-risk populations are supported and hospitalizations are limited.

When a respiratory outbreak is reported in an institutional setting with vulnerable individuals (e.g. a long-term care or retirement home, child care centre), OPH meets all provincial requirements/mandates by assisting the institution with the management of the outbreak. In responding, OPH staff using a risk-based approach to outbreak management may:

- Speak with individuals on-site to confirm the existence of the outbreak;
- Recommend IPAC measures designed to prevent the spread of the outbreak;
- Conduct an on-site assessment of the facility's capacity to control the outbreak;

- Meet with members of the facility's outbreak response team to provide education and make recommendations based on the specific circumstances of the affected facility;
- Monitor the outbreak daily and liaise with facility staff to respond to questions or concerns; and
- Troubleshoot with the facility when they have challenges or difficulties bringing the outbreak under control.

### **Supporting Influenza Prevention and Response Across the Health System**

In supporting Ontario's mandate to end "hallway healthcare," OPH collaborates with affected stakeholders (hospitals, facilities, community care access centres, and others) during the influenza season to ensure they have the information they need to ensure safe and appropriate resident transfers or repatriations/discharges from hospitals.

OPH generates and updates a daily list of active outbreaks posted on [OttawaPublicHealth.ca](http://OttawaPublicHealth.ca) to inform partners (including hospitals, Ottawa Paramedic Services, Ministry of Health, etc.) of facilities affected by an outbreak. In addition, OPH will provide training to hospital staff to support facilities in making evidence-informed decisions about repatriation best practices.

OPH works closely with healthcare and community partners and stakeholders to protect the community from influenza through a number of initiatives:

- Prioritizing vaccine distribution early in the season, as vaccine becomes available, to community partners and stakeholders that service high-risk populations including long-term and acute care facilities.
- Distributing vaccine directly to health care providers in the region participating in UIIP, which includes cold-chain inspections, vaccine education at point of inspection, and follow-up on cold chain breaks.
- Supporting vaccine distribution to pharmacies in the region, who receive vaccine from Ministry-approved wholesalers, through cold chain inspections, temperature log monitoring and follow-up on reports of cold chain breaks.
- OPH facilitates and chairs the Ottawa Infection Prevention and Control Coordinating Committee (OIPAC-CC) to coordinate and support the activities of acute care hospitals related to IPAC (Infection Prevention and Control), facility

outbreak management and emergency preparedness for influenza and novel pathogens. Membership on this committee includes representation from IPAC leadership at acute care hospitals, Public Health Ontario, Ottawa Paramedic Services, as well as ad hoc members based on agenda items (e.g. Public Health Ontario laboratory).

- OPH provides information packages to partners across the school system to support them to report influenza outbreaks in their facilities. OPH's School Health Nurses also work to coordinate any necessary public health interventions, as well as aid in communication between school administration and OPH if needed.
- OPH recently developed and disseminated an *IPAC Guidance Document for Homelessness Settings* to support shelters with strategies to reduce the spread of infectious diseases within their facilities. OPH will continue to raise awareness of the guidance and support available for shelters.

Lastly, OPH leads the Ottawa Interagency Influenza Planning Committee (OIIPC), which meets twice yearly. Members of OIIPC, representing key stakeholder agencies from across the health sector, combine their expertise to review the *Ottawa Interagency Influenza Pandemic Plan* each year. The plan provides a strategic framework for emergency operations during an influenza pandemic or unusually challenging influenza season, focused on connecting impacted residents of Ottawa with assessment and treatment services best matched to their needs. This collaborative effort aims to increase the ability of Ottawa health practitioners, agencies and partners to work together to address pressure points in Ottawa's health system during an influenza pandemic.

### **Influenza surveillance for the 2019/2020 season**

OPH will continue to monitor influenza activity in Ottawa throughout the year. During the influenza season a weekly [Respiratory and Enteric Surveillance Report](#) is posted online, on [Ottawapublichealth.ca](http://Ottawapublichealth.ca). Lab-confirmed cases of influenza are reported to OPH and deaths related to resident or patient cases from influenza outbreaks in institutions and public hospitals are also reportable. Local syndromic surveillance data on influenza like illness (ILI), including hospital admissions and emergency department visits, is reviewed using the [ILI mapper](#). Provincial and national flu activity is monitored weekly through the [Ontario Respiratory Pathogen Bulletin](#) and the [FluWatch report](#), respectively.

## **RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

The approach presented in this report will support continued access to influenza vaccination in rural communities.

## **CONSULTATION**

As outlined in the report, OPH consults with many community partners and agencies in preparation for the 2019/2020 influenza season.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal impediments to receiving this report for information

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

As described in the discussion above there are identified risks to residents for the upcoming influenza season resulting from a delay in the availability of the vaccine and the possible increased disease prevalence of influenza which have been addressed and will be mitigated by the actions presented in the 2019/2020 Influenza Plan.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

There are no direct accessibility impacts associated with this report.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1: Ottawa Public Health Influenza Immunization Clinic locations

## **DISPOSITION**

Ottawa Public Health will implement the 2019/2020 Influenza Season Plan, as described in this report.

## **REFERENCES**

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<sup>1</sup> National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2019-2020. An Advisory Committee Statement (ACS), May 2019. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public->

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[health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2019-2020.html](http://health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2019-2020.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ontario Ministry of Health. Universal Influenza Immunization Program. July 2019. Accessed September 4, 2019. Available at: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/flu/uiip/>

<sup>3</sup> Ottawa Public Health. Integrated Public Health Information System (iPHIS), Ontario Ministry of Health, 2019. [Extracted on August 2, 2019]

<sup>4</sup> Tokars JI, Olsen SJ, Reed C. Seasonal incidence of symptomatic influenza in the United States. *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. 2017 Dec 1;66(10):1511-8. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/66/10/1511/4682599>

<sup>5</sup> Ottawa Public Health. Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance system, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada. Vaccination Coverage Goals and Vaccine Preventable Disease Reduction Targets by 2025. Accessed: 04-Sept-2019. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization-vaccine-priorities/national-immunization-strategy/vaccination-coverage-goals-vaccine-preventable-diseases-reduction-targets-2025.html#1.0>

<sup>7</sup> Implications of the Southern Hemisphere influenza season and other considerations for the upcoming influenza season. Email communications from Public Health Ontario, August 6, 2019.