



GREATER ESSEX COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Response to a National Health Risk

August 2009

INTRODUCTION

The Greater Essex County District School Board advocates for a healthy and safe workplace for all staff, students, parents, volunteers, contractors and other building occupants. To that end, the Board has co written a “Response to a National Health Risk”.

In order to proactively respond to a national health risk, this document has followed the City of Windsor’s framework to develop an organizational plan. Additionally, the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (Health Unit) has been an essential resource by providing models of other planning structures from the Ministry of Health and by providing a community forum to update the community agencies on the level of community risk of a potential national health risk.

For the purposes of this document, a national health risk can include, but is not limited to, an outbreak of an infectious disease, for example influenza. Outbreaks of influenza require public health resources and community partnerships to control the spread and minimize the impact of the virus. There have been three influenza pandemics in the past century, Spanish (1918), Asian (1957), and Hong Kong (1968), which resulted in many millions of deaths. Viruses spread quickly especially in our modern world of travel.

The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan (2003) indicates that an outbreak timeline can range from six to eight weeks per outbreak wave with a second wave occurring “within three to nine months of the initial outbreak wave and may cause more serious illness and deaths than the first.” (WEC Pandemic Planning Committee, p. 6). During that time up to 30% to 35% of the Board’s workforce may be absent for an extended period of time due to the effects of a virus. This figure does not include the “sympathetic sick” (i.e. people that may be required to stay home to care for ill family members) or ones who refuse to come to work.

The decision to close the schools in our community will come directly from an order by the Medical Officer of Health in consultation with the Directors of Education. However, it should be noted that the Premier of Ontario may declare that an emergency exists and take appropriate action, i.e. closing schools.

The Medical Officer has determined that the following two measures will be endorsed for the public to follow in the event of a health risk:

1. Stay home if an individual has the symptoms related to the health risk, for example, if exhibiting influenza symptoms in an influenza pandemic.
2. Restrict public congregation or movement, for example, closing sports complexes or closing schools.

These measures reduce the spreading of the virus in a short amount of time. However, the same amount of people may be affected and these measures will actually lengthen the time of the epidemic. While this notion may seem contrary to public thought, it is to ensure that there are enough services during an epidemic throughout the time of critical need. The Medical Officer has assured the GECDSB that school buildings will not be used as an alternative site for hospital, or treatment facilities.

The dual purposes of this plan are to:

- ensure that the GECDSB has the capacity to maintain essential service delivery and business continuity during such a health risk in conjunction with our community partners.
- provide guidelines including the prevention strategies, essential services, issues and implications, action plans, and training.

This plan will go into effect when:

- The Health Unit advises us that a national health risk has reached our community, or
- Our staff absences are approaching 30% of our workforce.

Having all of our employees understand and know about this plan is essential for smooth operation of implementation. Job descriptions may be expanded during this time frame of a national health risk to ensure that each workplace for staff and students is safe. Safety is paramount. In the event job descriptions may be altered, the respective union presidents will be notified promptly.

PREVENTION MITIGATION

Health Unit has determined two measures to avoid contracting an infectious virus:

1. Wash hands with soap, and
2. Keep a social distance from other people.

To that end, the Board outlined a hand washing and hygiene practices for all staff to follow. Additionally, the Board supports “flu shots” immunization programs.

Hand Washing/Hygiene Practices

The Board’s Hand Washing/Hygiene Practices safety guideline was developed to prevent and reduce the risk potential of acquiring and the spreading of influenza-like viruses.

1. Educating and promoting proper hand washing/hygiene practices for staff and students (for example poster campaign, distribute hand sanitizer to all GECDSB sites).
2. Assisting the Board with attendance management (i.e. fewer ill staff and students).

Hand Washing

- All Supervisor(s) and Worker(s) are required to promote hand washing on a regular and frequent basis. Hand washing should occur prior to eating and drinking or after working with or handling items.
- The usage of Board provided hand washing facilities and soap dispensers is encouraged.
- Promotional materials to help encourage hand washing practices utilizing soap and water can be referenced through the Supervisor(s) via the local Windsor Essex County Health Unit.
- Alternative measures to utilizing soap and water may include hand sanitizers.

Hygiene

- Building cleaning practices are also performed to prevent the spread of common viruses;
- The Board’s Custodial cleaning practices of surfaces and ledges can be referenced under the Facility Services Menu of Services.

The implementation of these prevention requirements helps to reduce the spread of influenza-like viruses which reduces the amount of sick and lost time for staff, students, parents, volunteers, contractors and other building occupants.

Immunization Program(s)

The Board strongly supports annual immunizations “flu shots” to best protect against influenza-like viruses for all staff, students, parents, volunteers, contractors and other building occupants. Immunization practices help prevent and reduce the risk potential of acquiring and the spreading of influenza-like viruses.

The Board’s Joint Employee Assistance Program “JEAP” can arrange for a Service Provider to come out to individual Board worksite locations and provide immunization of flu shots. This “Workplace Influenza Immunization Program” is conducted in conjunction with our community partners such as the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit.

This program can be provided by Board workplaces contacting JEAP and implementing the following steps:

- Choose a date and time for the clinic at the worksite location.
- Arrange for an appropriate area at the worksite location to conduct the clinic.
- Distribute educational and promotional materials prior to the clinic.

Our community partners will:

- Provide promotional materials and assessment forms, and answer any questions about the influenza vaccine.
- Provide professional and knowledgeable nursing staff and all supplies needed for the injections (syringes, needles, vaccine, etc.).
- Work with the Board to set up an appropriate clinic site.
- Assist the Board with pre-booking appointments in order to reduce disruption in operations.

Clinics can be conducted on different days, times and locations to best meet the needs of all parties.