



Ontario College of  
Social Workers and  
Social Service Workers

Ordre des travailleurs  
sociaux et des techniciens  
en travail social de l'Ontario

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## **The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Pandemic Plan**

### **Introduction**

A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic in which a disease spreads easily and rapidly. An influenza pandemic occurs when an influenza virus changes and becomes a new strain against which people have little or no immunity and this new strain is easily spread from person to person.<sup>1</sup> Influenza pandemics have occurred approximately three times per century. Although there is no way to predict when the next pandemic will occur, many experts believe that it is overdue and planning must take place to deal with such emergency. A well considered and comprehensive plan, aligned with the plans of other authoritative organizations, is critical to support the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) operations during a pandemic. All College members and staff should be familiar with this plan and maintain it for future reference.

The OCSWSSW pandemic plan has been developed with significant reference to other plans, including the [Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan](#) and the [Ontario Health Pandemic Influenza Plan](#).

The OCSWSSW has also borrowed liberally from the pandemic plans of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario, the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario and the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario. We are grateful to these colleges for their support.

The intent of this plan is to introduce the steps involved and concepts to be considered when developing a professional practice emergency plan and to assist individuals to begin to prepare their own plans in the event of a flu pandemic. The key factors in this plan are the ability of the OCSWSSW to carry out its mandate of public protection, provide ongoing services and disseminate important information to its members.

### **The Role of the College**

When the Emergency Management Unit of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care declares a pandemic outbreak, the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers will implement the College's Business Continuity Plan for an influenza pandemic. At this point in time, it may be necessary for College operations to move to a virtual format. Staff will be available to provide consultation to the extent possible via

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<sup>1</sup> Registrant Pandemic Planning Kit, College of Physiotherapists of Ontario

telephone and e-mail contact and through the College website, in order to continue the operation of essential regulatory tasks. The College telephone message and website will provide information on College operations.

### **Five Critical Functions**

The College has identified five critical functions as part of its Business Continuity Plan that will guide decisions about operational functions during a pandemic. These critical functions are as follows:

1. Ensure effective communication with College staff, members, Council, the public and stakeholders. The College will continue to provide access to government and health information related to the pandemic via its website.
2. Provide consultation on regulatory issues and standards of practice. The College will strive to provide proactive and real-time consultation related to the application of the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice during an influenza pandemic.
3. Maintain a mechanism to register qualified professionals. The College recognizes the need to register new members and renew the registration of existing members as a priority during a pandemic.
4. Continue corporate services, functions and activities. The College will endeavour to maintain its core corporate services during a pandemic. However, depending on a multitude of external factors, it is realistic to assume that some or all of this may not be possible.
5. Conduct other business as required to address regulatory issues.

### **General Obligations of Members**

During a pandemic outbreak, members of the OCSWSSW will continue to be governed by the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998* and as such, will be obliged to practise according to the College's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Social workers and social service workers have certain obligations concerning the provision of service in such emergency circumstances. Social workers and social service workers will need to consider their personal competencies relevant to the provision of service during an influenza pandemic and develop a plan for decision-making and involvement. In an emergency situation, there may be a need for social workers and social service workers to be relocated from their usual roles and settings. The obligations for members of the OCSWSSW have been addressed in an article "[Pandemic Planning: What are my obligations? Considerations for members of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers.](#)" The obligations of health care professionals have been considered in the article "[Stand on Guard for Thee: Ethical Considerations in](#)

[Preparedness Planning for Pandemic Influenza](#)” from The University of Toronto Joint Center for Bioethics (November 2005).

During an influenza pandemic, governments and public health authorities will have to make difficult decisions. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has adopted a framework for decision-making using the following ethical principles:

Individual liberty  
Protection of the public from harm  
Proportionality  
Privacy  
Equity  
Duty to provide care  
Reciprocity  
Trust  
Solidarity  
Stewardship  
Family centered care  
Respect for emerging economy

For more details on the ethical framework for decision-making visit the [Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic](#).

### **Pandemic Planning Key Considerations**

Members should undertake to consider the following key issues in relation to their professional role and responsibilities:

- To be informed regarding provincial [Ontario Health Pandemic Influenza Plan](#) and local plans for a pandemic, particularly the role of one's particular profession and the opportunities for participation.
- To establish and maintain a link with a public health communication source to ensure that current and relevant information is available for personal ongoing decision-making.
- To maintain and make available resources, appropriate to the practice setting and provider role, for purposes of personal and public safety; this includes the implementation of any safety precautions, such as infection prevention and control.
- To consider professional competencies relevant to the provision of service during an influenza pandemic and develop a plan for decision-making and involvement.
- To make decisions regarding the provision of service based on the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

- To work within the legislative structure of the Social Work and Social Service Work Act when considering new roles and responsibilities.
- To be knowledgeable about the pandemic plan of your employer.
- To comply with government directives as announced pre-, during and post-pandemic

### **The Role of the Ministry of Health**

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) is responsible for planning and managing the response to an influenza pandemic in Ontario, including activities such as:

- implementing national recommendations;
- conducting surveillance activities;
- coordinating investigations of outbreaks;
- confirming pandemic activity in Ontario;
- providing guidelines and direction to local public health authorities and the health care system to ensure a consistent response across the province.

The MOHLTC has developed the [Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic](#) which describes in more detail the province's role and sets out expectations for local health authorities. The Ontario Government Ministry of Health information line is 1-866-801-7242.

### **The Role of the Employer**

It is essential that businesses and organizations make reasonable efforts to protect the health of their employees, safeguard critical operations and plan for a pandemic. To assist organizations to prepare for and manage the impact of an influenza pandemic, the MOHLTC has published a “[Guide to Developing a Workplace Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic](#).”

The guide follows a four pronged strategy:

1. Communication: opening lines of communication with employees, clients and external suppliers;
2. Containment: containing the disease to the extent possible by reducing the spread at an organization’s location(s);

3. Continuity: maintenance and continuity of critical services, and;
4. Personal Preparedness: preparing individuals for a pandemic.

For individuals working as employees, it is important to be informed of your employer's pandemic plan and your role within that plan. Social workers and social service workers who employ others need to consider the impact of a flu pandemic on a workplace setting and the employees and develop a plan on how this situation will be managed. Pandemic planning checklists are available along with additional resources for employers. Links to some of these resources are provided below.

[Pandemic planning checklists for employers](#)

[Entry point notice](#)

[Infection control poster](#)

[Hand washing](#)

## **What You Can Do**

### 1. Get informed

It is important to take the time to educate yourself on this topic by knowing the facts. Developing good infection control practices in your day-to-day activities will help to reduce the spread of infectious diseases. Proper hand washing as well as practising coughing and sneezing etiquette that encourages sneezing into your sleeve are current evidence-based best practices, shown to be the most effective ways to reduce the spread of infections.

[Hand washing](#)

[Infection Control for Regulated Professionals](#) - Although this booklet was developed by and for the Health Regulatory Colleges governed by the *Regulated Health Professions Act 1991*, members of the OCSWSSW may find many parts of this document helpful.

### 2. Have a plan (personal and professional)

Proactive steps you can take now, to help prepare yourself and your family, include making a plan and preparing a kit of resources available in the event a pandemic outbreak is declared.

[Make a Plan](#)

[Personal Emergency Kit Checklist](#)

### 3. Stay informed

In the event that the MOHLTC declares that a pandemic situation exists in Ontario, the most up-to-date information will be available directly from the MOHLTC website [www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic) or by calling the MOHLTC INFO line at 1-866-801-7242. Free advice and information will also be available via Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or you can contact the MOHLTC Emergency Management Unit directly at 1-866-212-2272.

4. Inform your clients

See resources in “General Facts Sheets.”

5. In the event of an influenza pandemic, comply with Public Health and MOHLTC Emergency Management Unit directives.

### **Fact Sheets for Healthcare Providers**

Fact sheets are available from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website to assist health care providers in pandemic influenza preparedness planning. The information is intended to ensure that health care providers understand communications, roles and responsibilities and the overall strategy that will be employed in the event of an influenza pandemic. The list of fact sheets is available from the [Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care](#) website.

### **General Fact Sheets**

Pandemic-related fact sheets are available from the [Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care](#) website. The focus of these fact sheets is to provide resources to inform the general public. Social workers and social service workers may find these resources helpful when preparing their individual and family plans as well as useful resources to inform clients seeking information on the topic of influenza pandemic. These Fact Sheets are available in 24 languages.

### **General Resources**

[The World Health Organization](#) (WHO)

WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for coordinating the global response to an influenza pandemic.

[Health Canada Pandemic Influenza Portal](#)

[Public Health Agency of Canada](#)

Communicates with key international organizations about outbreak activity world-wide. It is responsible for coordinating a nation-wide response.

[Government of Canada Pandemic Influenza Plan](#)

[Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care \(MOHLTC\)](#)

Responsible for planning and managing a response to a pandemic in Ontario.

[Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic](#)

Developed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

[What you should know about a flu pandemic](#)

Developed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

[What you need to know about Seasonal Flu and H1N1 Flu](#)

[MOHLTC Emergency Management Unit](#)

Plans, organizes, manages and coordinates provincial responses to emergencies that affect and impact health.

[Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory](#)

[Local Public Health Units](#)