



## Hamilton Board of Health Report for Information

**To:** Chair and Members  
Hamilton Board of Health

**Date:** February 23, 2026

**Report No:** BOH26009

**Subject/Title:** Orientation to Public Health Emergency Management

**Ward(s) Affected:** (City Wide)

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### Recommendations

- 1) That Report BOH26009 respecting an Orientation to Public Health Emergency Management **BE RECEIVED** for information.

### Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide the Board of Health with an Emergency Management overview as it pertains to Hamilton Public Health;
- Emergency Management is one of the Ontario Public Health Standards with an associated Guideline that outlines legislative requirements for Public Health Units;
- Hamilton Public Health has an emergency response structure, consistent with the Incident Management System, that coordinates the public health response to local emergencies with public health impacts;
- During a declared Public Health emergency, the Board of Health will receive communications on the issue and provide input into the strategic direction of the response; and,
- Hamilton Public Health has invested resources into building internal capacity to respond to emergencies and increasing overall resiliency and preparedness through strengthening collaborative networks.

## **Financial Considerations**

Not Applicable.

## **Background**

Not Applicable.

## **Analysis**

Emergencies can occur anywhere and at any time highlighting the importance of emergency management. Effective emergency management increases preparedness and resiliency to emerging threats to ensure the continuous delivery of time critical services. This report provides an emergency management legislative summary for public health units, outlines how Hamilton Public Health responds to emergencies, and discusses current initiatives to increase overall preparedness and resiliency.

## **Legislation**

The legal authority for emergency management in Ontario is established in the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* and its associated Regulation (O. Reg 380/04). The legislation includes requiring municipalities to have a Community Emergency Management Coordinator, the completion of a Hazard Identification Risk Assessment and Critical Infrastructure list, establishing an Emergency Operations Centre, and requiring annual training and public education engagements. Requirements of this legislation are overseen by the City's Emergency Management Program which is part of the Hamilton Fire Department.

The legal authority of public health programs and services is established in the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. The *Health Protection and Promotion Act* establishes the legal authority for Minister of Health to mandate public health programs and services through the Ontario Public Health Standards. The Ontario Public Health Standards identify the minimum expectations for public health programs and services. Emergency Management is one of those standards with the goal to enable consistent and effective management of emergency situations. The Ontario Public Health Standards also include the Emergency Management Guideline which provides more prescriptive direction on how to ensure the requirements of the standard are met.

## **Hamilton Public Health's Response to Emergencies**

Since emergencies can originate from many different hazards and can vary in scope, scale and duration, Hamilton Public Health has adopted an all-hazards approach to emergency management. This approach focuses on common roles, responsibilities, and processes consistent with the Incident Management System, that can be applied to all emerging threats. The Incident Management System is a standardized approach to emergency response and ensures interoperability when multiple agencies are involved. It is the same emergency response system used by the City of Hamilton's Emergency Operations Centre Management Team and provincial partners.

At Hamilton Public Health, emerging threats are generally handled at the program level. These are regular occurrences that staff respond to such as an institutional outbreak of influenza, a rabies exposure, a salmonella outbreak at a restaurant or a local case of Tuberculosis. When a situation exhausts the resources of a program including those which might be deployed from other programs to support response, or when the response required by a program impacts the ability to maintain their regular time critical services, Hamilton Public Health may activate their Incident Management System.

The Incident Management System is predicated on the fact that in every incident there are certain management functions that need to be carried out: Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance and Administration. The people component of the Incident Management System that carry out the overall management and coordination of the response and consequence management are referred to as the Public Health Emergency Control Group. This group comes together during emergencies to ensure response priorities are established, and that planning and response activities are coordinated both within the Public Health Emergency Control Group and with other Emergency Operations Centres (e.g. City, hospitals, community providers, etc). The Control Group uses incident action planning to set and monitor response and recovery objectives.

Hamilton Public Health's Emergency Control Group is distinct from the City's Emergency Operations Centre Management Team, although they often work together on City-wide emergencies. The City's Emergency Operations Centre Management Team, supported by the City's Emergency Management Coordinators, also follows the Incident Management System and consists of representatives across City functions, including Hamilton Public Health.

In the past, Hamilton Public Health has activated the Public Health Emergency Control Group independent of the City's structure, for public health emergencies (e.g., wildlife rabies outbreak in 2015, meningitis outbreak in 2015, opioid response in 2018 to lay the foundation for the Drug Strategy). For emergencies like COVID-19, or the recent Cyber Incident, that had large impacts across the city, both the City's and Public Health's emergency response structures were activated. In such situations, Hamilton Public Health has a position in the Operations section of the City's Emergency Operations Centre Management Team. This role is generally fulfilled by the Medical Officer of Health, or designate, and acts as a conduit back to the Public Health Emergency Control Group to ensure information exchange and alignment of actions and priorities.

Any time the Public Health Emergency Control Group is activated, the Board of Health will receive communications and updates on the situation. The Board also shares responsibility to help keep the public informed and amplify public health messaging relevant to the response.

### **Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency Planning**

Emergency management requires a collective effort across Hamilton Public Health to help ensure readiness and resiliency. The following section details some of the legislative, and best practice work that is being done within the Emergency Management portfolio and across Hamilton Public Health. In addition to these, there are examples within each program of initiatives that help to increase preparedness.

- **Collaborative Networks and Flexible Workforce Planning**

Recent reports from the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health and Canada's Chief Public Health Officer have put an emphasis on developing collaborative networks across the health system and highlighted the need to build a skilled and resilient public health workforce that is cross trained in public health core competencies to be ready to respond to emergencies.

Hamilton Public Health continues to focus on sustaining and building on collaborative networks across the health system. Last year, Hamilton Public Health convened a local response table of health system partners to coordinate the response to the increase in measles cases noted both in Hamilton and across Ontario. One of the program goals for this year is to formalize these collaborative response tables across the health system and create a standing Health System Emergency Management Table to respond to local emergencies impacting the health system. This will augment the existing collaborative emergency management networks that Hamilton Public Health is already a part of, including Hamilton's Emergency Preparedness Advisory Committee, whose membership includes City departments and community partner agencies involved in, or supporting, emergency response, and the Ontario Public Health Emergency Managers Network, a group of public health emergency management professionals from across the province.

To help build and maintain a skilled and resilient workforce needed to manage response to infectious diseases of public health significance, Hamilton Public Health has implemented two competency programs for Public Health Nurses. The Immunization Competency Program ensures that nursing staff across public health programs have the necessary knowledge, judgement and skills required to meet the needs of community immunization during a pandemic, outbreak, or other surge capacity event. These nurses additionally provide increased capacity annually in routine vaccine program work supporting respiratory season vaccination clinics or the school-based vaccination program. The program combines independent learning with clinical skills development days and clinical experience at immunization clinics to develop competency and familiarity with clinic logistics, provincial databases and reporting systems. The Case and Contact Management Competency Program ensures that nursing staff across Hamilton Public Health have the foundational knowledge to onboard quickly to a case and contact management role during a pandemic, outbreak, or other surge capacity event. Over the past year, this has also provided additional case and contact management staff support in response to increases in measles activity during the provincial outbreak. The program consists of an independent learning package which is supplemented with additional just-in-time training and mentoring at the time of deployment.

- **Hazard Identification and Emergency Planning**

Foundational to emergency management is identifying the local hazards most likely to impact the city and creating plans to minimize the impact. The City of

Hamilton's Emergency Management Program coordinates on-going revisions of the City's Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Report, which Hamilton Public Health is involved in. This report details the various hazards in the city and assigns a risk rating based on the probability of occurrence and impact of the result. That information then informs emergency plans, procedures, training programs, and exercise development. These plans are constantly being developed and updated to ensure relevancy.

Hamilton Public Health annually reviews business continuity and contingency planning. Business continuity planning helps guide decision making when a disruption is experienced, helping to ensure the continued delivery of critical services to the community. All Hamilton Public Health program services have gone through a business impact analysis that identifies how time critical the service is. The most essential services are prioritized during an emergency to ensure continued delivery. At the program level, business continuity plans are created to ensure contingency strategies are in place for those essential services. Contingency planning is also routinely done for other scenarios, such as labour disruption, to minimize the public impact. Plans are continually created and revised annually.

- **Health Equity and Continuous Improvement**

Health equity and continuous improvement are important aspects of an emergency response. To help inform responses, a Vulnerable Population Assessment resource has been developed by Hamilton Public Health based on the City's Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment and helps inform Hamilton Public Health's Incident Action Planning. The resource supports planning and response sections in identifying barriers and response considerations for equity deserving populations.

Learning from previous emergencies and exercises to ensure continuous improvement is crucial to building resiliency. Hamilton Public Health prepares an after-action report with associated corrective actions after every exercise and actual emergency activation. Last year after-action reports were developed following events impacting operations (e.g., a measles outbreak, etc.) and emergency exercises (i.e., extreme heat and mass overdose). Corrective actions from these reports are tracked by the Emergency Response Coordinator to ensure completion. Implementing these corrective actions will continue to be a focus for Hamilton Public Health this year.

- **24/7 Notification and Response**

Hamilton Public Health maintains emergency response capacity 24/7 through the emergency on-call system. A dedicated team with leaders and staff from the Healthy Environments and Communicable Disease Control Divisions, along with the Medical Officer of Health or one of the Associate Medical Officers of Health, is always available to respond to an emergency. This call system is facilitated by the City of Hamilton's Customer Contact Centre. Training, guidance documents

and procedures are continuously created and updated to ensure staff have the knowledge, skill, and ability to respond.

- **Training and Exercise**

An Emergency Management foundational knowledge training module was recently developed and is required for all Hamilton Public Health staff. The module consists of a general background about emergency management and related legislation, the incident management system, how Hamilton Public Health responds to an emergency, and potential deployment roles for staff. This will be continually updated to reflect changes in legislation or best practices. This year will bring additional training requirements for those with roles on the Public Health Emergency Control Group including the provincial Incident Management System (IMS) 100 course.

Hamilton Public Health also develops and has staff participate in annual emergency exercises. These exercises help responders prepare for actual emergencies. The focus of the exercise changes every year and is informed by the results of the Hazard Identification Risk Assessment. Specific hazards that have been exercised recently include, extreme heat, mass poisoning, chemical spill, active attacker, and various infectious diseases.

## **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic re-iterated the importance of emergency management and having a coordinated public health response. Recent reports from the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health, along with legislative changes, have emphasized the value in establishing collaborative networks and building a flexible and resilient workforce. Hamilton Public Health continues to increase capacity in these areas to further overall preparedness for future emergencies.

## **Alternatives**

Not Applicable.

## **Previous Reports Submitted**

Not Applicable.

## **Consultation**

- Kristen Marples, Program Manager, Emergency Management, Healthy and Safe Communities
- Pike Krpan, Emergency Management Coordinator, Healthy and Safe Communities

## **Appendices and Schedules Attached**

Not Applicable.

**Prepared by:** Kris Nagel, Emergency Response Coordinator  
Hamilton Public Health, Communicable Disease Control Division

**Submitted and recommended by:** Jordan Walker, Director  
Hamilton Public Health, Communicable Disease Control Division