



Boards of Health can at any time experience new or emerging events ranging from infectious diseases such as COVID-19, SARS, and the H1N1 influenza pandemic to extreme weather events and environmental hazards such as flooding and ice storms.

Emergency planning for such events is critical in strengthening the overall resilience of public health and the broader health system.

Public Health emergency management encompasses emergencies which are Public Health led (e.g. pandemic), as well as emergencies where Public Health partners with the Region or other partners to respond to emergencies that may include public health risks (e.g. a serious environmental event that may lead to water safety/ food safety risks).

### **Examples of Public Health emergencies or emergencies with a public health impact:**

There are two primary ways that Public Health can participate in emergency response:

- Actively lead an emergency response during a health emergency in the community (such as infectious disease outbreaks)
- Support a regional/municipal emergency response in situations where community health consequences may arise (such as a flood, extended power outage, or support for evacuation/reception centre)

Emergencies where Public Health would play a lead or support role include:

- Outbreaks of infectious diseases (e.g. SARS, H1N1, COVID-19, Meningitis)
- Contamination of local drinking water
- Major food-borne illness event

### **Incident Management System (IMS)**

Operationally, Public Health emergency response is carried out using Incident Management System (IMS) frameworks utilized by the Region and Provincial government partners. This supports an organized, collaborative approach to the response and recovery processes.

### **Roles and responsibilities:**

#### **Regional Council as the Board of Health**

In the event of a public health emergency or an emergency with public health impacts, the role of Regional Council as the Board of Health is to be aware of the situation and remain abreast of Public Health's response, which would be integrated with a Regional or municipal emergency response when needed.

Regional Council should expect to receive updates on the Public Health response from the Medical Officer of Health and designated staff. In Region of Waterloo, this would occur through normal channels of communication to the Board of Health (e.g., Community & Health Services Committee / Regional Council or email updates from the Medical Officer of Health or Public Health Staff) or, if integrated with a Regional emergency response, through mechanisms established for the latter.

## Medical Officer of Health and Public Health staff

The roles and responsibilities of the Medical Officer of Health (and by extension, designated or appointed Public Health staff) are granted under the Health Protection and Promotion Act. The Health Protection and Promotion Act also provides the legal authority for the Medical Officer of Health to respond to a public health emergency. Regional and/or municipal emergency response plans may also establish additional roles and responsibilities for the Commissioner/Medical Officer of Health in an emergency. The Medical Officer of Health is responsible for:

- Coordinating the response to public health related emergencies or anticipated emergencies
- Providing direction in accordance with the Health Protection and Promotion Act on matters which adversely affect public health
- Liaising and collaborating with Regional departments (e.g. Water Services, Housing, Children's Services), various government agencies and relevant local health care organizations as relevant
- Updating key decision makers



## Public Health support in municipal emergency response plans

Local municipalities may enact their city or township emergency plans in response to an incident, and may request the support of Regional services, including those of the Public Health Department. This would be coordinated through the Regional Emergency Management Office.

The information contained in this fact sheet originates from the **Ontario Public Health Standard** document, **Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.9., Health Protection and Promotion Act, R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER H.7**, the Regional Municipality of Waterloo Emergency Response Plan, Schedule "A" to By-Law No. 04-026, and the Public Health and Emergency Services Emergency Response Plan.

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request.