



Effective emergency management programs ensure that Boards of Health are ready to cope with, and recover from, threats to public health or disruptions to Public Health programs and services. This is done through a range of activities carried out in coordination with other community partners. This planning, and its associated activities, is critical for strengthening the overall resilience of boards of health and the broader health system.

Public Health emergency management includes both Public Health emergencies, and when Public Health partners with the Region or other health care and community organizations to respond to emergencies. Emergency management requires planning and activities to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from emergencies that may put human health at risk.

Public Health has an Emergency Response Plan that covers the responsibilities of Public Health staff during an emergency.

The Ontario Public Health Standards:

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

Advanced emergency planning for such events, and its associated activities, is critical in strengthening the overall resilience of public health and the broader health system.

Foundational Standard Goal:

To enable consistent and effective management of emergency situations.

Program Outcome:

The Board of Health is ready to respond to and recover from new and emerging events and/or emergencies with public health impacts.

Requirement:

The Board of Health shall effectively prepare for emergencies to ensure 24/7 timely, integrated, safe, and effective response to, and recovery from, emergencies with public health impacts in accordance with ministry policy and guidelines.

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

There are two primary ways that the Medical Officer of Health and Public Health can participate in an emergency:

- Actively lead an emergency response during a health emergency in the community (such as infectious disease outbreak, like SARS or H1N1)
- 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 functions overseen by the Region's Community Services Department)

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

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



- 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
- Updating key decision makers and seeking direction as appropriate

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 any Regional or municipal emergency response

Regional Council should expect to receive updates on the Public Health response from the Medical Officer of Health and designated staff, in accordance with Public Health’s mandate as per the Ontario Public Health Standards (described above) and tailored to local needs. In Region of Waterloo, this would occur through normal channels of communication (e.g., CSC reports, email updates) or through reports to the Region’s Emergency Control Group, depending on scope, scale, timing and urgency.

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:

Public Health support in municipal emergency response plans

Local municipalities may enact their city or township emergency plans in response to an incident, and typically request the support of the Medical Officer of Health and Public Health staff with their response. During an emergency declared by the Region of Waterloo, the Commissioner/ Medical Officer of Health is automatically a member of the Regional Emergency Control Group, and provides Public Health support for the response through this group.

Under such circumstances, Public Health would also liaise with health care system representatives including the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) whose role in an Emergency Response continues to evolve.

Other roles for municipal representatives

The Regional Emergency Response Plan includes further information about the role of Council members during an emergency.

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.