



PANDEMIC PLAN

March, 2020

Introduction

A pandemic occurs when a novel virus which is virulent and easily transmitted infects humans. Currently, the Coronavirus (CO-VID 19) is serving to bring a sense of urgency to the need for pandemic contingency planning and planning for moving into operational mode.

From the Ontario Government webpage “The 2019 novel coronavirus 9(CO-VID 19) causes a respiratory infection that originated in Wuhan, China. The first presumptive case of this infection in Ontario was identified on January 25, 2020.”

Definitions: (From the WHO website - <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/3/9/21163412/who-coronavirus-covid19-pandemic-world-health-organization>)

Outbreak – when a disease infects a lot of people in one area in a short period of time.

Epidemic – the occurrence in a community or region of cases of an illness....clearly in excess of normal expectancy. The Centre for Disease Control defines it as “an increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected” in a region.

Pandemic – the dictionary of epidemiology defines a pandemic as “an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people.” Note that this refers to how many parts of the world are dealing with an elevated rate of a disease and does not refer to how serious the disease is.

Pandemic Cycle

The World Health Organization identifies the following pandemic cycle.

“In nature, influenza viruses circulate continuously among animals, especially birds. Even though such viruses might theoretically develop into pandemic viruses, in **Phase 1** no viruses circulating among animals have been reported to cause infections in humans.

In **Phase 2**, an animal influenza virus circulating among domesticated or wild animals is known to have caused infection in humans, and is therefore considered a potential pandemic threat.

In **Phase 3**, an animal or human-animal influenza reassortant virus has caused sporadic cases or small clusters of disease in people, but has not resulted in human-to-human transmission sufficient to sustain community-level outbreaks. Limited human-to-human transmission may occur under some circumstances, for example, when there is close contact between an infected person and an unprotected caregiver. However, limited transmission under such restricted circumstances does not indicate that the virus has gained the level of transmissibility among humans necessary to cause a pandemic.

Phase 4 is characterized by verified human-to-human transmission of an animal or human-animal influenza reassortant virus able to cause “community-level outbreaks”. The ability to cause sustained disease outbreaks in a community marks a significant upwards shift in the risk of a pandemic. Any country that suspects or has verified such an event should urgently consult with WHO so that the situation can be jointly assessed and a decision made by the affected country if implementation of a rapid pandemic containment operation is warranted. Phase 4 indicates a significant increase in risk of a pandemic but does not necessarily mean that a pandemic is a forgone conclusion.

Phase 5 is characterized by human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region ([link](#)). While most countries will not be affected at this stage, the declaration of Phase 5 is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short.

Phase 6, the pandemic phase, is characterized by community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region in addition to the criteria defined in **Phase 5**. Designation of this phase will indicate that a global pandemic is under way.

During the **post-peak** period, pandemic disease levels in most countries with adequate surveillance will have dropped below peak observed levels. The post-peak period signifies that pandemic activity appears to be decreasing; however, it is uncertain if additional waves will occur and countries will need to be prepared for a second wave.

Previous pandemics have been characterized by waves of activity spread over months. Once the level of disease activity drops, a critical Communications and Media Administrator task will be to balance this information with the possibility of another wave. Pandemic waves can be separated by months and an immediate “at-ease” signal may be premature.

In the **post-pandemic** period, influenza disease activity will have returned to levels normally seen for seasonal influenza. It is expected that the pandemic virus will behave as a seasonal influenza A virus. At this stage, it is important to maintain surveillance and update pandemic preparedness and response plans accordingly. An intensive phase of recovery and evaluation may be required.

This phased approach is intended to help countries and other stakeholders to anticipate when certain situations will require decisions and decide at which point main actions should be implemented (see [Table 3](#)). As in the 2005 guidance, each of the phases applies worldwide once announced. However, individual countries will be affected at different times. In addition to the globally announced pandemic phase, countries may want to make further national distinctions based upon their specific situations. For example, countries may wish to consider whether the potential pandemic virus is causing disease within their own borders, in neighbouring countries, or countries in close proximity.”

Legal Basis

The Medical Officer of Health determines the actions needed to be taken to protect the population from a communicable disease (Health Protection and Promotion Act 1990).

The Medical Officer of Health has the authority to issue an order if she/he is of the opinion upon reasonable and probable grounds that a communicable disease exists or may exist or that there is an immediate risk of an outbreak.

Purpose

This plan has been developed to assist Administration and Principals in preparing for and managing the impact of a health related emergency. With the existing threat of a pandemic, the Board recognizes the need for preparedness. The plan was designed to provide for the continuity of instruction, and the continued safety of staff and students in the event of a pandemic or other health related emergency. In the event of an emergency, such as a flu pandemic, our schools and Board offices will be subject to higher than normal staff and student absenteeism, interruptions to transportation, and the closure of schools/Board offices.

This plan includes guidelines and steps each school/Board office should take in the event of outbreak or threat of an outbreak. It will be subject to revisions pending wider research regarding ongoing events world-wide and nationally. This document therefore, is a working document that will be updated as needed.

Key Messages

- The Keewatin-Patricia District School Board is well prepared for a pandemic. Our plan is completely open to staff, parents, students and the community for their information and feedback.
- During a pandemic, the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board will follow the advice and guidance of provincial and local public health officials who have the expertise to assess the level of health risk posed by a specific situation.
- Our priority during a pandemic is to keep schools open as long as it is safe to do so. Non-essential services may be halted to focus on providing the most necessary services to our community.

INTERPANDEMIC PERIOD: (Contingency Mode) Planning and coordinating occurs during this phase. Schools and Board offices become prepared; staff, students, and parents become well informed and understand their roles before during and after a pandemic.

Actions to be taken during this period:

- The Central Safety Steering Committee (consisting of Bargaining Unit Presidents, the Superintendent of Human Resources and Special Education, the Human Resources Manager, the Human Resources Officer with OHS responsibility, the Safe Schools Coordinator and the Assistant Manager, Facilities Operation and Maintenance) will

develop and update the Board's Pandemic Plan for final approval by Senior Administration

- The Pandemic Plan, once finalized, will be issued/rolled out to the system
- Additional resources will be issued/rolled out to the system – these may include videos, posters, etc. that can be shared with home/staff/students
- The Board website will be updated to include a specific area where the public and staff can access the additional resources noted above
- Cleaning practices will be reviewed by the Facilities Department with a view to changes that may be made both in anticipation of a pandemic and in the case of a pandemic

Operations – Organizational Structure

In the event of a pandemic being declared, the following organizational structure will be implemented:

1. **Senior Administration (Director and Superintendents)** will be responsible for directing the system on a day-to-day basis.

Their role will be as follows:

- To direct the overall operation of the system
- To receive reports from the Operations Committee
- To make decisions as to the regional operation of the board
- To review plan for the release of information as prepared by the Operations Committee and to authorize the sending of media releases
- To determine the closing of any school(s) due to excessive absenteeism
- To provide a contact list for the system of the members of the Operations Committee

2. **Operations Committee.** This Committee shall consist of the Director of Education, Superintendents of Education, the Superintendent of Business, Managers, the HR Officer responsible for Safety and Health, the Communications and Media Administrator, an Elementary Principal and a Secondary Principal. Each appointee will also be required to declare an alternate and keep that person informed of the progress of the committee. The structure of the committee is subject to change dependant upon the geography of the outbreak. Any such alteration will be determined by Senior Administration.

The establishment of the Operations Committee will have the effect of centralizing operations. It will ensure that a highly structured and directed mode of operations be followed.

Their role will be as follows:

- To monitor and make recommendations on the overall operation of the system on a daily basis

- To make a clear and complete assessment of situations that may arise in the system
- To act as a resource to Senior Administration
- To recommend courses of action to Senior Administration
- To help determine the substance of all news releases
- To act as an emergency resource for Superintendents of Education, Principals and other Board personnel

Operational Mode: When local circumstances warrant (i.e. 30% of KPDSB schools report an absenteeism rate of over 10% with similar symptoms (Influenza like illness (ILI)), the Board will move into operational mode and the following actions may be taken:

1. Regular meetings of the Operations Committee will occur and the committee will review update reports from all Superintendents including absenteeism reports.
2. The Superintendents of Education will make contact with schools and offices on a regular basis. It shall be the responsibility of the Superintendents to ensure that there is always a Superintendent of Education available to respond to an emergency situation.
3. Requests by the media will be referred to and received by the Communications and Media Administrator. Schools will be closed to the media.
4. In the event of an emergency situation arising, the Superintendent of Education shall make decisions regarding requests for assistance. Senior Administration or designate shall be consulted in all cases in which an emergency decision must be made.
5. The Operations Committee will make assessments of situations and will develop a series of recommendations for Senior Administration. In addition, media releases will be determined. The Operations Committee shall decide how to handle specific requests by the media brought by the Communications and Media Administrator.
6. The Operations Committee will make a determination as to the need to implement the Facilities Department Pandemic Procedures for cleaning.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

It is our intention to conduct the affairs of the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board in accord with existing KPDSB policies and operating procedures.

Additionally, during contingency and operational modes, the following list of activities/services will be continually monitored by the Operations Committee as they pertain to the need for social distancing.

After Hours School Permits – existing/new permits for school facility use may be cancelled/not issued

Board Meetings – Board meetings will be held as scheduled and more frequently if necessary and may be held electronically

Community Schools – after hours activity/access to community schools may be cancelled

Continuing Education – night school and summer school programs may be cancelled

Critical Incident Response – the critical incident response teams may not be deployed in the usual manner

Extracurricular Activities – extracurricular activities may be cancelled

Field Trips/Excursions – there may be a moratorium on field trips/excursions

Food Programs – school based food programs may be cancelled

Home Instruction – home instruction may be cancelled.

Meetings – meetings that take administrators or staff out of school may be either cancelled or held by teleconference

Professional Development Activities – professional development activities and attendance at conferences may be cancelled

School Councils – principals should have a plan for communication with the Chair of their School Council. School council meetings at the school, regional or district level may be cancelled.

Courier – will operate as usual where possible

Essential Maintenance Services – in the areas of heating, air conditioning and controls, electric, plumbing, P.A. systems, fire alarms, snowplowing and sanding/salting, grass cutting, locksmith services and computer repair may be contracted and we expect to have adequate resources in the event of any emergency which should be reported by the principal or designate to the Assistant Facilities Manager, Operations and Maintenance and/or Learning Technologies Manager.

Caretaking Services – Subject to changes required as a result of being in operational mode, normal caretaking services will continue. Discussions with the union may occur should absenteeism rates require the Board to find an alternate means of continuing such services

Garbage Collection – the normal process for garbage collection will be maintained where possible

Instruction/Evaluation/Reporting – where possible, the regular instructional program and those activities related to instruction, evaluation and reporting will continue

Maintenance – the normal procedure shall continue, i.e. emergency calls will be directed to Maintenance with a follow-up through the Assistant Manager, Facilities Operations and Maintenance as soon as possible. Maintenance items, which are not of an emergency nature, will be handled in the normal manner, however, Board staff and outside contractors will be used for all types of emergency maintenance and routine maintenance may be suspended.

Security of Facilities – while schools are open, security of facilities will continue in accordance with current procedures. In the event that schools are closed, additional security patrols may be scheduled for all affected buildings.

Student Transportation – The General Manager of the Northwestern Ontario Student Services Consortium will be the dedicated liaison to the Operations Committee. Subject to review, buses will maintain regular schedules while schools remain open. Bus operators will inform the General Manager when absentee levels of bus drivers reach a point that will jeopardize the operator's ability to provide adequate and safe levels of service. At this time, student transportation services may be suspended.

Supplies/Orders – the normal process for order and delivery of supplies will be maintained.

Volunteers – the present practice regarding volunteers in each school should be reviewed on a regular basis and a determination made as to continuation or cancellation.

Leases – Third party occupants will be consulted during the operational phase with regard to the ability for the programs to continue to operate

Communication Strategies

The following communication strategies may be used during either contingency or operational mode. Frequency of Communications and meetings will depend on local circumstances and will be determined by the Operations Committee in consultation with local health authorities.

- Should a pandemic be confirmed in Ontario, the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board may put into place a cascade of meetings to ensure face to face communication with all staff.
 - Superintendents of Education meet with administrators, providing information about the information received from public health authorities.
 - Explain how schools would operate during contingency should a pandemic be confirmed locally.
 - Scripts will be developed in consultation with Senior Administration and sent to Administrators to use in conducting staff meetings in order to ensure consistent messaging.
 - All meetings will emphasize the message that the board expects all staff to come to work if they are well, unless public health authorities or the board close their school/worksites. Staff will be given direction about how to find out if their school or worksite is open or closed.

- Scripts, Q&A and other background information for schools and other administrators may be provided. Any questions or concerns as a result should be forwarded to the Operations Committee and will be responded to as quickly as possible. Any information provided will be shared with all sites to ensure consistent messaging.

- The Board will ensure education resources and periodic updates are shared with parents and staff. Post information on board website.
- The Board will ensure consistent messaging that if students are well, they are expected to come to school unless public health authorities or board close schools. Alternatively, if students are ill, they should remain at home.
- The Board will ensure consistent messaging to parents that field trips, excursions, food days may be cancelled during contingency and let them know they will receive specific information from their school about refunds/rescheduling at a later date.
- Child care providers will be provided with a main board contact to direct questions/concerns.
- Bargaining Unit Presidents will receive updates from the Operations Committee through their membership on the Central Safety Steering Committee. This would most likely be done in the form of an e-mail with an opportunity to send back questions and or identify concerns.
- The Board will inform media that the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board will go into operational mode if there is a confirmed case of pandemic locally and advise media how the board will operate in contingency.
- When in operational mode, an email will be sent to notify all staff informing them of the public health guidance and direction the board has received. Reminders of the following may be included:
 - Board function during operational mode, e.g. what vital services will continue and what activities will be curtailed.
 - Where to find additional information sources.
 - Expectation of staff to come to work if they are well, unless public health authorities or the board closes schools or worksites.
- When in operational mode, a letter will be sent home to parents explaining that the board is now in operational mode. The letter should explain main ways to get information and may include the board website, school voicemail and a toll free telephone number that may be established.
- When in operational mode, individual schools or specific schools, may use the synervoice system or phone trees to contact parents. If the email system distribution list is fully operational, it may be used to send information out to parents
- When in operational mode, parents and staff will be reminded of vital services that will continue in schools and those that will be cancelled.
- When in operational mode, parents may be directed to the website or a toll free number that will be established, for information including bus cancellations and school closures.

- When in operational mode, regular updates to the board website will be posted by the Communications and Media Administrator Assistant following Operations Committee Meetings. These updates may include:
 - Status of schools
 - Information pertaining to vital services being continued or cancelled
 - Information on which schools are closed and open.
 - Where to find additional information sources.
- When in operational mode, schools should update voicemail system to provide overall information and status of schools
- When in operational mode, schools may be provided with standard signage, “School is Open” or “School is Closed” to be posted on the school exterior each day to help communicate with parents and/or will utilize electronic signage in place at each school
- When in operational mode, schools may be provided with voicemail scripts to use on their school voice mail to provide parents and staff with the information about the status of their school.
- When in operational mode, schools may be provided with scripts for secretaries to answer parent questions.
- When in operational mode, schools/sites will be closed to the media except where special permission has been provided by the Director of Education or designate.
- When in operational mode, Trustees will receive via email regular updates following Operations Committee meetings. Regular board meetings will be conducted via teleconference, unless otherwise determined jointly by the Director of Education or designate and the Chair of the Board or designate.
- When in operational mode, updates for media will be distributed regularly. Distribution will be via email and posted on website.