



## POSITION STATEMENT: INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

An Influenza pandemic is a worldwide epidemic in which a disease spreads easily and rapidly. While the timing and location of an influenza pandemic outbreak is difficult to predict, the reality is that research at the level of the World Health Organization indicates that influenza pandemic planning must be considered to be an imperative health issue by governments, health systems, health providers and consumers.

In response, Canada and in turn the provinces, including Ontario, have developed detailed and specific responses to the influenza pandemic threat. These plans, which are updated at least annually require local and regional planning for an event that while random in nature, will have devastating consequences when and if it does occur. In essence, Ontario's pandemic plan provides leadership to provincial organizations and local planners and providers.

The College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario (COTO), as well as individual occupational therapists have a role to play. During an infectious disease outbreak, such as an Influenza Pandemic, demands for care may result in health providers having to weigh the provision of such care against competing obligations to their own health and that of family members. In the current context of pandemic planning, there is a need for discussion and dialogue on this issue, in order to protect the values of openness and transparency, as well as the need to be inclusive of stakeholder views. This document reflects the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario's position on an Influenza Pandemic.

The College has identified two significant and different responsibilities in pandemic planning. The first is to execute its regulatory function and administrative operations in unusual times. The second is to act as an information conduit to the public, Registrants, and stakeholders.

With regards to the latter, the role of the College will be to ensure appropriate communication, and knowledge dissemination to occupational therapists and their employers, on their individual roles and responsibilities.

The College recognizes that occupational therapists possess in their array of skill sets, a number of skills which can contribute to the execution of local pandemic plans. These include, but are not exclusive to:

- Providing care to susceptible or vulnerable clients requiring specific intervention who would be at risk without this intervention;
- Considering risks to practice and utilizing an ethical framework to determine individual roles, responsibilities and accountabilities;
- Opting to assume additional skills and under delegation, to facilitate care delivery in unusual circumstances and or in alternate roles (e.g. providing triage functions, injections and discharge planning in Alternative Care Centres, which are being planned by the Public Health Departments).

## POSITION STATEMENT

It is the position of the College that occupational therapists should consider the following key issues in relation to their professional role and responsibilities.

- To become and remain informed regarding the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic, (OHPIP) and local plans for a pandemic, particularly regarding the role of occupational therapy and the opportunities for participation
- To maintain a link with a public health communication source to ensure that current and relevant information is available for ongoing decision making
- To maintain and make available resources appropriate to the practice setting and provider role, for purposes of personal and public safety, as well as to participate in the implementation of any safety precautions, such as infection prevention and control
- To consider personal competencies relevant to the provision of care during an influenza pandemic and develop a plan for decision making and involvement
- To make decisions regarding provision of care based on consideration of a profession specific Code of Ethics or within an ethical framework
- To work within the legislative structure of the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA) when considering new roles and responsibilities (e.g. giving injections)
- To comply with government directives as announced pre, during and post pandemic