



How Can I Maintain My  
Family Practice During an  
Influenza Pandemic

## How can I maintain my family practice during an influenza pandemic?

Strategy	Preparing before pandemic influenza is in the community	Responding when pandemic influenza is in the community
<b>Deliver services in different ways</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the types of services that could be delivered by phone</li> <li>• Identify the types of prescription medications that can be renewed without having the patient come into the office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide as much care and advice as is safely possible by phone</li> <li>• Consider home visits to patients whose health might be compromised by coming into the office</li> </ul>
<b>Defer some services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify those primary care services that can safely be reduced or deferred during a pandemic</li> <li>• Learn how to access information from your public health unit during an emergency (<a href="http://www.healthunit.org">www.healthunit.org</a>, 1-800 660-5853)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make decision about which services to defer and for how long based on the severity of the pandemic, and triage patients</li> <li>• Access information in real time from the medical officer of health about the severity of the pandemic in your region and how to handle services</li> </ul>
<b>Deliver new services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take into account the new services that you may have to take on during a pandemic (e.g., services currently provided in hospital; assisting at assessment centres)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement plan</li> </ul>
<b>Develop plans to ensure continuity of care for all patients, including vulnerable patients</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a list of vulnerable patients (e.g., people who live alone, people who are handicapped, people who require ongoing monitoring for a health condition, frail elderly)</li> <li>• Identify strategies to meet their needs during a pandemic (e.g., regular phone contact, having them move in with a family member, home blood pressure monitoring, referral)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement plan</li> </ul>
<b>Use appropriate occupational health and safety/ infection prevention and control practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be familiar with recommended occupational health and safety / infection prevention and control practices</li> <li>• Be aware of your responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (e.g., train workers, provide appropriate personal protective equipment)</li> <li>• Recommend annual influenza immunization for all staff</li> <li>• Place alcohol-based hand rub at the point of care and at the doors, ask coughing patients to wear a surgical mask in the waiting room, schedule ILI patients at a certain time of day, conduct telephone triage, cohort patients in the waiting area, erect plexiglass barriers between receptionists and clients</li> <li>• Develop policies to encourage staff to stay home when they are sick</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce training, hand hygiene policies and procedures, cough etiquette, and use of personal protective equipment</li> <li>• Use the screening tool provided by the MOHLTC to screen patients for flu symptoms, and implement appropriate precautions e.g., referring patient to a Flu Centre (if established), asking patients to wear a surgical mask in the waiting area, have a separate area for ILI patients</li> <li>• Schedule patients so that you only see ILI patients at a certain time during the day (e.g., non-ILI patients in the morning and ILI patients in the afternoon)</li> <li>• Conduct telephone triage to divert patients to appropriate level of care</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine the type of personal protective equipment required for all staff based on the job that they perform</li> <li>• Ensure you have received your infection control kit from the MOHLTC</li> <li>• Establish fit testing program for staff who require N95 respirators (phase 5)</li> <li>• Maintain a four-week stockpile of personal protective equipment (MOHLTC will also maintain a four-week stockpile. To access, contact the Ministry Emergency Operations Centre at 1-866-212-2272)</li> <li>• Use MOHLTC training materials to provide general training/information for staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the same screening tool to screen staff for flu symptoms and implement appropriate workplace practices (i.e., ask staff to go home if they are sick)</li> <li>• Clean more frequently and follow environmental guidelines for cleaning</li> <li>• Access ministry equipment stockpiles when necessary</li> <li>• In the event that supplies of equipment such as N95 or comparable respirators run out, provide surgical masks</li> </ul>
<b>Establish links with other primary care providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish links and make arrangements to provide coverage for one another</li> <li>• Identify opportunities to share resources (e.g., staffing a patient call line, fit testing of N95 masks, designating one site for influenza assessment and another for other patients)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work collaboratively to maintain essential primary care services and provide care for people with influenza</li> </ul>
<b>Be part of the community's pandemic plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that LGL Health Unit, the MOHLTC and your professional college and association have your up-to-date contact information so you will receive information and directives during a pandemic (<a href="http://www.healthunit.org">www.healthunit.org</a>, click on Healthcare Professionals, Pandemic Influenza)</li> <li>• Negotiate arrangements to provide services in other settings, if required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement role in the plan</li> </ul>
<b>Communicate with patients</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a list of patient contact information</li> <li>• Tell patients how office and care practices will change during a pandemic (e.g., more care provided by phone, the use of alternate assessment and treatment services)</li> <li>• Give patients information about how to protect themselves from flu and how to care for family members who fall ill (<a href="http://www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic">www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic</a>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use messages on answering machines and signs to advise patients to call the office or Telehealth, rather than coming in</li> <li>• Walk-in and after hours clinics should post signs advising people to phone to determine whether they should come into the clinic or go elsewhere for assessment</li> <li>• Post information about the services that will be deferred during the pandemic</li> </ul>
<b>Communicate with staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain an up-to-date list of staff contact information</li> <li>• Inform staff about the plans to maintain services during a pandemic</li> <li>• Consult with and inform Joint Health and Safety Committee / representative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update staff each day</li> <li>• Use information provided by the MOHLTC (e.g., Important Health Notices, directives) to ensure staff receive consistent messages</li> </ul>
<b>Maintain emergency plan (BCP)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and update your business continuity plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement business continuity plan</li> </ul>

## Examples of Primary Care Needs that Can or Cannot be Deferred

Priority	Description	Examples
Priority A	<p>Patients who have urgent needs and require services/treatment and would otherwise have to go to a hospital for care</p> <p>Essential preventive services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acute exacerbation of a chronic illness that doesn't require hospitalization</li> <li>• Complications of pregnancy</li> <li>• Certain acute infection, such as otitis, UTI, cellulitis, STIs</li> <li>• Acute major illness/injury</li> <li>• Acute minor injuries (e.g. lacerations)</li> <li>• Acute psychiatric illness</li> <li>• Abdominal pain NYD</li> <li>• Musculoskeletal pain</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Palliative care</li> <li>• Patients recently discharged from hospital on new medication who must be followed closely (e.g., warfarin)</li> <li>• Patients requiring pneumococcal immunization</li> </ul>
Priority B	<p>Patients whose situation is non-critical and who require treatment / services that can be deferred for a few weeks (i.e., during the peak of the pandemic wave)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable chronic disease management, including asthma, diabetes, hypertension, and stable cardiac, pulmonary, renal, neurological or hepatitis disease</li> <li>• Uncomplicated pregnancy care – 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester</li> <li>• Well baby visit</li> <li>• Routine childhood immunization</li> </ul>
Priority C	<p>Patients whose condition is non-life threatening and who require services that can either be deferred or managed in another way (e.g., automatic prescriptions) for the duration of a pandemic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well child and adult checkups</li> <li>• Nutrition and weight counselling</li> <li>• Pap smears</li> <li>• Routine adult immunization</li> <li>• Preventive services and clinics</li> <li>• Insurance and other forms</li> </ul>

Reference: Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic, August 2008