

Practice Guideline

Preparing for an Influenza Pandemic

An influenza pandemic occurs with the appearance of a new flu virus to which the human population has little or no immunity to. It results in several simultaneous epidemics worldwide and an enormous number of illnesses and deaths. A pandemic is much more serious than seasonal influenza and can occur at any time of the year. People of all age groups may be at risk of infection, and a significant number of health care workers may be absent from work due to illness or other caregiving responsibilities.

During a pandemic, there will be a great demand for nurses¹ to provide care. To ensure that nurses are prepared, it is important that they review their accountabilities and responsibilities in advance. This fact sheet is to help nurses understand what the College of Nurses of Ontario (the College) expects of its members during a pandemic, and what support members can expect from their College.

College expectations

The College protects the public's right to quality nursing services and recognizes that an extreme public health crisis, such as an influenza pandemic, demands extensive involvement from nurses to care for the sick and contain the spread of infection. The College expects nurses to actively assume their obligation as self-regulating health care professionals by providing nursing care during an epidemic.

The College expects nurses to fulfil their commitment to clients,² the profession and the public during an influenza pandemic by providing nursing care within their individual professional competencies. It also expects nurses to keep informed about pandemic plans and public health communication systems.

A nurse's accountabilities

The fact that a nurse is providing care during a pandemic does not negate the nurse's responsibility for delivering quality care. Nurses are expected to adhere to the overall framework for the practice of nursing as outlined in the College's practice standards and guidelines. Collectively, these publications provide a guide to the knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes that nurses need to practise safely, effectively and ethically. They describe what each nurse is accountable for in practice. Many of the standards and guidelines include decision-making tools or processes to help nurses decide how to respond to difficult situations.

Seeking out current information from reliable sources and having it on hand during a pandemic supports safe practice. Nurses need to be aware of their organization's policies, and review the College's related standards and guidelines before a pandemic emerges. It is also imperative for nurses to seek out the necessary resources within their organization, and refer to the College's standards, guidelines and web-based resources for assistance.

College resources for nurses

The College recognizes the heightened need for communication with members before and during a pandemic.

To support nurses in acquiring the information they need to provide quality care during a pandemic, the College will:

- maintain a section on its website to:
 - facilitate access to current government and related health pandemic information,
 - provide links to all College standards and guidelines, and identify those that may be

¹ In this document, *nurse* refers to a Registered Practical Nurse (RPN), Registered Nurse (RN) and Nurse Practitioner (NP).

² In this document, a *client* may be an individual, family, community or group.

- particularly relevant during a pandemic,
- provide pandemic-related scenarios and their resolutions, and
- announce any teleconferences or web offerings as they become available; and
- make every effort to continue practice consultation services by phone and e-mail.

College services during a pandemic

The extent to which the College can continue its operations will depend on a number of factors, including the severity of the pandemic, interruptions in important supplies and the effect of the pandemic on the College's human resources. For this reason, the College has identified communication as one of its four primary roles and has made it a priority during a pandemic. If the number of staff members is reduced, the College will realign its operations to support the above activities and the following priority services:

- member communications, including ongoing website updates, telephone advice and consultation about College policies, standards and guidelines as they relate to pandemic situations;
- collaborative stakeholder relations pertaining to the pandemic;
- select registration processes for the Temporary and Special Assignment Classes;
- investigations into serious allegations of unsafe practice; and
- continuation of the complaint process as outlined in the College's *Addressing Complaints at the College of Nurses of Ontario* process guide, as is possible. If the number of staff members is reduced, a triage intake process will be used to allow staff to focus on the more serious allegations. All complaints will be addressed in due course and within the College's resource capacity.

Documents containing pandemic-related information

Although the College does not have a practice document specific to pandemics, it does have several practice standards and guidelines that can provide guidance in situations that may arise during such a crisis.

Practice Standards

- *Infection Prevention and Control*
- *Ethics*

- *Decisions About Procedures and Authority*
- *Nurse Practitioner*
- *Confidentiality and Privacy – Personal Health Information*
- *Documentation, Revised 2008*
- *Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship, Revised 2006*
- *Professional Standards, Revised 2002*
- *Medication*

Practice Guidelines

- *Consent*
- *Influenza Vaccinations*
- *Telepractice*
- *Refusing Assignments and Discontinuing Nursing Services*
- *Working With Unregulated Care Providers*
- *Supporting Learners*
- *RN and RPN Practice: The Client, the Nurse and the Environment*
- *Working in Different Roles*
- *Disagreeing With the Plan of Care*
- *Conflict Prevention and Management*
- *Authorizing Mechanisms*

For more information

1. College documents and resources: www.cno.org/ publications
2. Information from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, including relevant legislation: www.health.gov.on.ca
3. Infection Control and Occupational Health Guidelines During Pandemic Influenza In Traditional and Non-Traditional Health Care Settings from *Prevention and Control of Influenza during a Pandemic for All Healthcare Settings—Annex F*: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca

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