# Chapter 5 Communications

Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan November2005 Chapter 5 Communications (Updated March 1, 2006)

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## Chapter 5 Communications

### **1.0 Introduction**

Effective and timely communication is critical before, during and after a pandemic influenza.

Chapter 5 provides information about the role of communications and outlines the communication plans and activities Toronto Public Health (TPH) would use to provide timely, accurate and credible information to its staff, the public, provincial and federal governments, hospitals and other responding agencies.

### 2.0 Core Communications

The communication plan addresses a number of areas critical to successful public and stakeholder communications before, during and after a pandemic. The plan identifies core goals, objectives, strategies, key messages and audiences, key spokespersons, approval processes, media relations and evaluation common to all pandemic periods. It describes specific actions required during the pandemic alert, pandemic and post pandemic periods.

The information needs of internal, external and stakeholder audiences are assessed in each phase to prepare appropriate messages and information products, and determine strategies. Risk (or crisis) communications principles are incorporated in each phase.

This communication plan has been developed with consideration of our partners in the community, health sectors and governments at all levels to ensure the common goal of improved readiness to protect the health of the population. It is aligned with the provincial, federal and World Health Organization (WHO) communication plans and includes the TPH response to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommendations on public education. For more information regarding the PHAC public education recommendations, please see Chapter 8, Public Health Measures.

#### Core Goals (what we want to achieve)

- Clearly explain and promote the Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan (TPIP)
- Provide information to the public and stakeholders to assist them in making the best possible decisions about their well-being during all phases of a pandemic

### **Core Objectives** (how we intend to achieve our goal)

- Establish a broad network for disseminating information during all pandemic phases
- Provide clear, accurate messaging to all audiences during all pandemic phases
- Communicate transparently, accurately and in a timely manner through a variety of methods to reach all audiences

## **Core Communications Strategy**

The pandemic communication strategy is broken down into three periods, corresponding to the phases of pandemic influenza outbreak as outlined by the WHO. The communication plan will evolve phase by phase, concurrently with the pandemic periods. Each phase or period has its own unique communications requirements. Communication products that are clearly understood, multilingual and available through multiple distribution systems will be developed for each period. By following a phased-in approach, the communications needs of internal, external and stakeholder audiences can be anticipated and developed. A range of communication activities will be undertaken at each phase. The WHO Pandemic phases are:

- Pandemic Alert Period (phase 3, 4, 5)
- Pandemic Period (phase 6)
- Postpandemic Period

For more information or detailed definitions of the periods and the phases within the pandemic periods, please refer to the Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan, Chapter 2 or the World Health Organization web site at <a href="http://www.who.int/en/">www.who.int/en/</a>

### **Core Key Messages**

During a pandemic two main messages will need to be expressed:

- What Toronto Public Health and/or the City of Toronto is doing to reduce illness and death and minimize societal disruption
- What the public can do to reduce illness and death and minimize societal disruption

For example:

Toronto Public Health will continue to provide timely and helpful information and advice on how you can protect your health and what to do if you or others become ill.

## **Core Key Spokespersons**

Each phase or period of a pandemic requires a primary spokesperson representing Toronto Public Health to ensure main messages are clear and aligned with those of other City divisions, governments or elected officials.

The primary spokesperson for Toronto Public Health during an Influenza Pandemic is the Medical Officer of Health or designate. Establishing a consistent, identifiable, credible Toronto Public Health spokesperson will contribute to reducing public anxiety and panic.

As the situation evolves and during each pandemic period, key spokesperson requirements and roles will be reviewed and evaluated. Knowledgeable and articulate subject matter experts outside the organization may be recruited as required. Toronto Public Health Communications Unit will coordinate media requests, verify appointed spokespersons, establish and build credibility for spokespersons and TPH and provide risk communications management and media training for key staff as needed.

## **Core Information Approval Process**

All Pandemic Influenza information issued by Toronto Public Health will be approved by the Medical Officer of Health or designate and the Manager of Communications. Content development for information is the responsibility of:

- Director of Communicable Disease Control and Associate Medical Officer of Health
- Associate Medical Officers of Health
- Manager of Communicable Disease Liaison Unit
- Designated subject matter expert or manager

Information, key messages, backgrounders and fact sheets will be developed and pre-approved in advance whenever possible. When an emergency has been declared, the TPH information approval process will be revised based on the Incident Management System (IMS) and the requirements of the City's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

### Core Audiences

### Internal

- Toronto Public Health staff
- Board of Health
- City Councillors
- Mayor's Office
- City of Toronto staff (particularly those dealing with vulnerable populations), including Homes for the Aged, Children's Services, Daycare, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Social Services, Court Services and those dealing with members of the general public
- Call Centre staff Access Toronto, Health Connection, 311 Project Office
- Corporate Communications
- City Manager
- Web and Internet Services
- Unions
- Executive Management Team
- City Managers
- Human Resources, Occupational Health and Safety
- Emergency response and recovery workers

#### **Stakeholders and Partners**

- Hospitals
- Health care professionals, including but not limited to: physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists
- Community agencies and groups, e.g. homeless services, settlement and immigration service providers, emergency shelter services, mental health agencies
- Other levels of government
- Other public health units
- Neighbouring municipalities
- TTC, Police Services, Fire Services, Emergency Medical Services
- Communication professionals in health care and other sectors
- Funeral industry
- Coroner's Office

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### External

- General Public recognizing the varying social, cultural and linguistic needs of Toronto's diverse communities
- Media TV, Radio, Print, New Technology (Internet), Multilingual
- Business, Trade & Industry
- Schools, Child Care Providers
- Colleges and Universities
- People with influenza and their caregivers
- People with chronic conditions and their caregivers
- Faith communities
- Volunteer agencies
- International community
- Visitors/tourist industry

### **Core Media Relations**

The media will be essential to the delivery of timely information to the public during a pandemic. From school closings to hand-washing tips to health system status, news reports will be the primary source of information for the vast majority of residents. The media will also play a central role in shaping public reaction to the pandemic itself, as well as the public's perception of how efficiently TPH and other agencies are responding to it.

TPH will provide media with:

- A dedicated pandemic influenza media phone number
- Access to credible spokespersons
- Accurate, consistent, timely and accessible information about the pandemic
- Details about what TPH is doing (except where doing so would compromise safety and/or security)
- Information placed in context of provincial, national and global events
- Specific public health information about how people can protect themselves and maintain health
- Quick response to rumours or inaccuracies
- Information that is consistent with that from federal and provincial governments, hospitals and other responding agencies as appropriate

Media Relations includes on-going media analysis, monitoring to identify trends and assist in determining strategy and response. In-depth analysis and evaluation will determine the degree to which communications efforts have met objectives.

### **Core Risk Communications**

Appropriate risk communication considerations should be applied before, during and after a crisis. Effectively communicating complex, scientific or technical information can improve public responses to a serious crisis. The communication plan takes into account the following:

- Provide information that is relevant and easily understood
- Protect TPH credibility and reduce the chances of panic
- Don't over-reassure
- Don't underestimate risk

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- Acknowledge uncertainty and change of circumstances
- Acknowledge people's fears and pain
- Give people things to do to adjust to the new environment
- Give people a choice of actions to match their level of concern
- Promote awareness of the changed environment

### **Core Evaluation**

Evaluation of the communications functions will improve program delivery and determine if communications is effective in meeting its objectives. The development of evaluation tools to gauge changes in attitudes, behaviours, knowledge, skills, status or levels of functions will be considered for each pandemic period. Key evaluation objectives and criteria of program success will be developed.

Evaluation activities will include monitoring of:

- Media Relations Daily monitoring and analysis of media coverage will determine if strategy is working and if improvements are required. To facilitate lessons learned and evaluation of communications after the pandemic, copies of newspaper clippings and television/radio broadcasts will be saved. News conferences, briefings, major speeches will be taped.
- Web visits
- Use of Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), an on-going telephone survey
- Call centre inquiries
- Hot line inquiries
- Public presentations
- Requests for information

## 3. 0 Pandemic Alert Period (Phases 3, 4, 5)

### **Pandemic Alert Goals**

- Increase awareness of the Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan
- Raise awareness of the risks of pandemic influenza and the steps people can take to minimize a pandemic influenza from spreading
- Determine, refine, prepare and test communications channels between TPH and its stakeholders

### Pandemic Alert Objectives

- Release and promote the Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan and encourage feedback
- Develop social marketing campaign to encourage proactive responses and behaviour change to reduce spread of infection
- Integrate pandemic influenza communications with broader health, emergency and corporate/divisional communications as well as federal and provincial communications activities (annual influenza campaign, emergency response messages)
- Prepare audiences for imminent onset of pandemic, particularly during Phase 5

## Pandemic Alert Strategies

Strategies during the pandemic alert period include using a variety of communication vehicles to raise awareness of what Toronto Public Health and the City of Toronto are doing to prepare for a pandemic and what individuals, businesses and others can do to prepare.

- Web site updates posting of the Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan, intranet/internet updates
- Establishment of secure intranet site for TPH staff
- Development of Pandemic e-mail address
- Presentations to the public, health care workers, health care stakeholders, internal audiences, business sector
- Preparation of sector-specific Planning Guides
- Social marketing campaign on hand washing, cover your cough/sneeze, stay home when ill (to include multiple ways to disseminate information)
- Direct mail campaign to include seasonal (spring/fall) newsletter from Medical Officer of Health to all residents with pandemic preparedness messages possibly combined with other important health messages such as smog, sun safety, West Nile Virus, heat safety, pesticide reduction
- Water bill inserts with hand washing/cover your cough messages
- Pandemic preparedness messages included with other TPH program messages to expand reach of communications channels
- Stories developed to show how simple infection control procedures increased positive outcomes
- Multilingual displays on infection control procedures developed for a variety of audiences, e.g. child care, schools, workplaces
- Ad campaign for major shopping malls
- Video and public service announcement on infection control procedures developed for physicians' offices, hospitals, elevators, schools
- Video and public service announcement on infection control procedures, video billboards
- Call centre recorded messaging on pandemic information
- Newspaper ad campaign
- Pandemic Hotline

### **Pandemic Alert Key Messages**

Key messages during the Pandemic Alert Period will focus on strategies in place to prepare for a pandemic, specifically how Toronto Public Health and the City of Toronto are building response capacity in all program areas for a pandemic. Key messages will inform the public about the situation and what they can do to protect themselves.

- City of Toronto is preparing for a pandemic
- All city divisions are working on pandemic response plans
- Businesses need to be prepared we can help you plan
- You can prepare too
- Wash your hands
- Cover your cough
- Stay home if you are ill

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### Pandemic Alert Key Spokespersons

The key spokespersons will focus on preparedness during the pandemic alert period.

- Medical Officer of Health Toronto Public Health
- AMOH and Director Communicable Disease Control Toronto Public Health
- Manager, Communicable Disease Liaison Unit Toronto Public Health
- Corporate/divisional spokespersons to be determined
- Health partner/stakeholder spokespersons to be determined
- Mayor
- Chair of Board of Health

### Pandemic Alert Information Approval Process

Toronto Public Health is the communications lead for the City during the pandemic alert period. The Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health Communications, and Communicable Disease Control will establish internal communications verification and clearance/approval procedures for Toronto Public Health. Corporate and other divisional pandemic messages will be developed in coordination with Toronto Public Health to ensure consistent key messaging. TPH will collaborate with provincial officials and other public health units.

### Pandemic Alert Audience

All internal, external and stakeholder audiences (see page 53) must be considered during the pandemic alert phase. Information content, translation requirements, distributions systems and feedback requirements will be considered for all deliverables and tailored to each audience as required.

### Pandemic Alert Media Relations

Toronto Public Health's (TPH) central message in the pandemic alert period focuses on planning and preparedness. Through a report to the Board of Health in May 2005 and many interviews, TPH informed the public, staff, other health partners and senior governments that the City is taking the risk of a pandemic seriously and is planning accordingly.

The TPH website remains a source of information on the pandemic and regular influenza for reporters. TPH is also working with the media to deliver its annual messages about flu shots and clinics. This activity is an opportunity to deliver pandemic influenza messages as well.

TPH will develop a health partner/stakeholder spokesperson list for the media.

A dedicated pandemic influenza media hotline may be necessary. TPH staff dedicated to pandemic influenza communications and provided with the latest information would respond to calls. This would provide one-stop shopping for reporters and help ensure accurate, timely and consistent messages from TPH. A dedicated line would also free up the regular media lines for requests not related to the pandemic.

## Pandemic Alert Risk Communications

During the pandemic alert period communications will focus on the following pro-active actions and strategies:

- Establish credible, trustworthy TPH spokesperson
- Consider and address each audience's needs and concerns
- Prioritize development of messages for each audience
- Ensure message is free from jargon, provides realistic advice and is easy to translate
- Use clear and effective graphics and design
- Consider audience education, current subject knowledge, experience, age, language spoken/read, cultural norms, belief systems, socio-economic status and geographical location

### **Pandemic Alert Evaluation**

Evaluation and feedback mechanisms will be built into communications vehicles whenever possible. Materials will be focus-group tested. Strategies used to meet the goals and objectives will be reviewed. Overall effectiveness of communications plan will be assessed. Telephone inquiries at all call centres, web site visits, event attendance, media coverage, correspondence will be measured. A communications summary report will identify benefits, costs and program changes prior to the next phase.

## 4.0 Pandemic Period (Phase 6)

### **Pandemic Period Goals**

- Reduce death and illness associated with sustained transmission of a new and virulent strain of influenza in the general population
- Minimize societal and economic disruption
- Communicate the changing role of Toronto Public Health during a Phase 6 pandemic period, including the activation of Emergency Operations Centres

### **Pandemic Period Objectives**

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities concerning decision-making authority and how decisions will be communicated
- Outline ongoing surveillance activities
- Communicate the importance of continuing with stringent infection control measures and other public health measures
- Communicate the symptoms of illness and notify health partners, the media and the public, especially seniors, long-term care providers, schools and vulnerable populations
- Announce changes in levels of TPH health care services

## **Pandemic Period Strategies**

The strategy during pandemic period Phase 6 will be to assist the public in coping with the pandemic influenza. This includes an explanation of what to expect during this phase of sustained transmission in the general population, including altering behaviours and changes in services for all audiences - internal, external and stakeholders.

The internal strategy requires a clear explanation of what to expect when the TPH Emergency Operations Centre has been activated. Details about the Incident Management System (IMS) and the roles and responsibilities of the Medical Officer of Health, the Public Health Incident Manager and the Public Information and Liaison functions will be communicated to staff and to the media.

The communications resources of all City divisions may be required to provide a comprehensive range of products and services. All divisions will be responsible to ensure residents and businesses are kept apprised of developments during the pandemic period, including any changes to the provision of City services and any major actions required. The Toronto Health Connection and Access Toronto Call Centre will play a critical role in delivering public information in the event of a pandemic. Call centres serve as a primary information service on behalf of the City. Call centre capacity will be expanded during an emergency to respond to increased call volumes. The official City of Toronto Web site will feature a direct link to pandemic information and will be updated regularly.

Stakeholder communication includes ensuring a timely exchange of information between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) Ministry Emergency Operations Centre, the Toronto Emergency Operations Centre and the Toronto Public Health Emergency Operations Centre, and sharing relevant information with all stakeholders. See Draft Communications Cycle – Pandemic Period, Appendix 10.

Actions include:

- Communications to staff voicemail, e-mail, hotline, secure intranet site for management of overall TPH response, including staff reassignments
- Notification of reduction of services and possible alternatives
- Promote official guidelines and recommendations
- Coordination of time, location, protocols for media briefings, staff meetings, teleconferences
- Updates and information exchange with hospitals and health partners
- Update of web posting
- Posters, notifications on public buildings
- Direct mail campaign support campaign to encourage prompt self-diagnosis
- Electronic and video billboards
- Transit messaging
- Phone messaging

## Pandemic Period Key Messages

Medical interventions such as vaccines and antiviral drugs will not be available for everyone. Messages will provide information about the distribution and specific things people should know or be doing to minimize risk and maintain health. For example:

- Toronto Public Health is responsible for the distribution and administration of vaccine and antiviral medication in Toronto
  Priority groups have been established federally and provincially for the distribution of vaccine and antiviral medication
- Toronto Public Health has a planned approach to reach the priority groups (with details on how people can obtain vaccine or antiviral medication)
- Updated information on the number of cases (confirmed, suspected and potential)
- Identification of which government level is responsible for which key decisions, programs, services
- Self-imposed isolation information to protect people from unnecessary exposure
- Infection Control Measures continue hand washing, "cover your cough" messages
- Business continuity messages (could include health precautions in the workplace, screening, environmental cleaning)
- How to stay healthy at home and at work
- Self diagnosis symptoms and prevention
- Self treatment what to do if you or your family get sick
- When to seek medical attention list and degree of symptoms
- How to seek medical attention where to go, protocol on how to enter hospital or medical centre
- Caring for the seriously ill
- Death at home what to do next
- Bereavement counselling and support messages
- Where to go for non medical help child care, pets, food
- Assess and publicize the current impact on Toronto, including reduction of programs
- Detailed information for health professionals
- Acknowledge and thank internal, external and key stakeholders for their efforts and cooperation
- Advise staff on appropriate personal protection

### Pandemic Period Key Spokespersons

Toronto Public Health will continue to provide expert medical advice and leadership through key spokesperson during the activation of the Toronto Public Health Emergency Operations Centre. Toronto Public Health key spokespersons will actively participate in the City's Office of Emergency Management response.

- Medical Officer of Health Toronto Public Health
- Associate Medical Officer of Health and Director of Communicable Disease Control –Toronto Public Health
- Public Health Incident Manager, to be determined
- Manager of the Office of Emergency Management City of Toronto
- Corporate spokespersons, to be determined (Human Resources, TTC, Police, EMS)
- Mayor City of Toronto
- Chair of Board of Health

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### Pandemic Period Information Approval Process

During a pandemic period, the information approval process becomes centralized through the Toronto Office of Emergency Management (OEM). The Toronto Office of Emergency Management is the coordinating agency for the City of Toronto Emergency Management Program Committee. This committee is composed of representatives from divisions throughout the City and assumes responsibility for managing and coordinating emergency operations and providing personnel and resources needed to minimize the effects of the emergency.

Approval of TPH messages is the responsibility of the TPH Incident Manager and the Medical Officer of Health or designate. The responsibility for preparing and releasing information to the public falls under the Public Information function of the Incident Management System. For more information please refer to the Toronto's Emergency Plan, May 2005 at

www.toronto.ca/wes/techservices/oem/index.htm

### Pandemic Period Audience

All internal, external and stakeholder audiences (see page 53) must be considered during the pandemic period. Communications content and delivery will be tailored to audiences as required. Particular focus and messages will be crafted for:

- People who are sick
- People who are taking care of people who are sick
- City staff
- Federal, provincial governments
- International audience
- Business community
- Hospitals
- Other health partners

### Pandemic Period Media Relations

The media are a prime transmitter of communication and information. They play a critical role in setting agendas and in determining outcomes.

The pace of media relations will accelerate significantly once the pandemic period begins. Messages to the public and staff, businesses and governments and the international community about the situation in Toronto will be delivered through the media. News releases, fact sheets, backgrounders, brochures, speaking notes, TV and radio ad scripts will be some of the communication products.

Once an emergency has been declared and the Incident Management System has been implemented, the responsibility for Toronto Public Health media relations and communication strategy shifts to the Public Information function under the Public Health Incident Manger.

Toronto Public Health Communications will support the Public Information media relations function along with communications staff from other City divisions.

News conferences will be held regularly. Timing would depend on when provincial and federal conferences take place. The Medical Officer of Health or designate will update the public health aspect of the pandemic's impact on Toronto. A communicable disease expert will be needed to provide clinical updates.

The Mayor, Chair of the Board of Health, EMS, Police and other agencies may be part of the media conferences. There may be a need for joint conferences with hospitals and other agencies, such as school boards, and senior governments. Media relations staff may be required to be on call late into the evening and possibly around the clock.

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## Pandemic Period Risk Communications

This period will involve a highly complex information environment. Communicating catastrophic news and helping people learn to cope with trauma and uncertainty requires attention to the following:

- Assessing the environment in which information is being introduced
- Understanding the public's attitude toward the situation
- Acknowledging and attempt to contain public anxiety, grief and distress
- Dealing with resistance to accept change
- Recognizing and acknowledging anger and frustration
- Keeping up with changes in decision making
- Addressing worry and concern

### **Pandemic Period Evaluation**

Evaluation during Phase 6 provides a significant opportunity to add to the international body of knowledge about this type of emergency communication plan. Evaluation will identify the benefits and costs of changes and assist in reaching an agreement on any needed adjustments in order to improve response strategy.

## 5.0 Postpandemic Period

### **Postpandemic Goals**

- Declare end of emergency operations
- Address public health needs, including grief and post-traumatic stress counseling
- Provide information on the re-establishment of essential public health services
- Acknowledge contribution of all stakeholders and staff

### Postpandemic Objectives

- Join with other stakeholders in public announcements to show comprehensive approach
- Publicly address community emotions after pandemic
- Make people aware of uncertainties associated with subsequent waves
- Prepare for transfer of responsibilities from Toronto Emergency Management Program Committee back to Toronto Public Health
- Request and advocate for recovery assistance as required

### **Postpandemic Strategies**

The strategy during this period is to help people move toward hope for the future through actions they can take and through the actions of all responders to the pandemic. Tactics that support the Toronto Public Health strategy for recovery may include:

- Official announcement of end to emergency measures
- Communication to residents and staff regarding the social and economic recovery plans
- · Announcements and notifications of gradual restoration of services
- Continued promotion of key health messages infection control procedures
- Information about possible relapse

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- Posters on public buildings
- Healthy City social marketing campaign with appropriate partners
- Direct mail campaign

### Postpandemic Key Messages

Key messages will inform the public of plans for the gradual return of services. The focus is on recovery and rebuilding. Key messages include:

- Toronto is recovering from the pandemic
- We are all adjusting to a changed environment
- This has been a difficult time for everyone
- Toronto Public Health will help you and your family
- Recovery means that residents can again access some of the best public health programs and services in the world services are increasing
- TPH continues to implement improvements in emergency planning
- TPH is working closely with partners, stakeholders and the community to improve capacity for community outreach after the pandemic
- TPH continues to work with businesses to help with recovery efforts
- Final death toll, other statistics
- Remembrance messaging

### Postpandemic Key Spokespersons

During this period key spokespersons from other City divisions, levels of government or elected officials will speak to their recovery efforts. In Toronto Public Heath key spokespersons include:

- Medical Officer of Health
- Associate Medical Officer of Health and Director of Communicable Disease Control
- Toronto Public Health Directors and/or Managers as required

### **Postpandemic Information Approval Process**

Information verification and clearance approval for the release of information are the joint responsibility of the:

- Medical Officer of Health
- Director of Communicable Disease Control and Associate Medical Officer of Health
- Associate Medical Officer of Health
- Manager of Communications
- Manager of Communicable Disease Liaison Unit
- Designated subject matter expert or manager

### **Postpandemic Audience**

All internal, external, stakeholders audience with particular focus on:

- Internal how to return to business as usual
- International
- Businesses

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### **Postpandemic Media Relations**

Once the pandemic ends, the media relations focus will shift to analysis and follow-up. Reports to the Board of Health and senior governments on the pandemic's impact on Toronto and the TPH response would be natural sources of further media interest. Recommendations for improvements, along with the associated issues of budgets and staffing, will also be a focus in this phase.

### **Postpandemic Risk Communications**

During the postpandemic period, risk communications will focus on the significant emotional needs of those who have been most affected by the pandemic. Understanding and being sensitive to the emotional and physical impact and the permanent life changes for individuals and organizations will help shape the tone of all communication. Key messages will:

- Acknowledge failures or mistakes
- Be a role model by showing a willingness to carry on
- Help people regain a sense of control by giving them reasonable choices
- Work with the community towards solution

### **Postpandemic Evaluation**

Evaluation of communications in the postpandemic period is an opportunity to review information about how functions and responsibilities have been carried out. It will document the progress made on meeting communications requirements and expectations during each pandemic period. An overall evaluation report will help identify effective and ineffective services, practices and approaches. By reviewing the communications strategies, tactics and actions Toronto Public Health can develop improved service delivery and determine future objectives for other programs. The evaluation of communications will likely be part of a larger evaluation report on the pandemic response. Evaluating the effectiveness of communications response and reviewing lessons learned will guide future actions.