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MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Pandemic Influenza Plan Approved by Middlesex Hospital Alliance Board

At their monthly meeting, the Middlesex Hospital Alliance Board of Directors approved a Pandemic Influenza Plan to guide hospital functioning in the event of an influenza pandemic.

“The plan is a blueprint for how hospital activities will be carried out during a pandemic and for dealing with, what could be, extraordinary pressures on our functioning as a healthcare provider,” Yvonne Lambert, Chair of the Middlesex Hospital Alliance board of directors, says.

“As a healthcare provider, we need to plan how to care for potentially, a very large number of infected people in our area,” Mike Mazza, CEO of the MHA says. World health authorities are predicting about a one third infection rate during the pandemic. “Additionally, each department in our organization needs a plan for how it will continue to function effectively with 1/3 fewer staff, not just front line nurses and doctors but also our lab, housekeeping and physical plant people need to be prepared. It will be essential for hospital staff and health care providers to be available to continue working. The antiviral Tamiflu has been purchased for the treatment of employees, physicians, volunteers – all those people who will be working in the hospitals during an influenza pandemic,” Mazza says.

An influenza pandemic is an outbreak of a new type of flu virus that spreads rapidly from one country to another. Infectious diseases experts have warned that a global influenza pandemic is overdue. The symptoms will be same as our regular seasonal influenza – fever, muscle pain and weakness, headache, tiredness, dry cough and sore throat – but will result in more serious complications and death in all age groups not just the very young and very old. It will take time to develop a vaccine that contains the pandemic strain as this cannot start until the specific strain is identified. Predictions are being made for a 35 per cent attack rate.

The plan was drafted by the MHA Pandemic Planning Team, led by Dr. P.C. Shah, Chair of the Infection Control Committee, and with input from Ontario Ministry of Health directives and the World Health Organization forecasts. The MHA team was formed in spring, 2006 and consists of representatives from departments at both Four Counties and Strathroy sites.

The MHA Pandemic Plan is comprised of two portions. There is an overall plan – staged in phases according to the World Health Organizations Pandemic Alert Phases – and there are individual departmental plans. The MHA Pandemic Influenza Planning Team met frequently over the last year to develop the final draft. With the plan approved by the MHA Board of Directors, it will now be available to all staff at Middlesex Hospital Alliance.

Says MHA Board Chair Yvonne Lambert; “A pandemic influenza is a frightening thought for us all. And this board wants to be as prepared as possible to deal with it – as an employer, a health care provider and an integral member of our community. A pandemic influenza will require our best planning, preparation and communication – communication among Ministry of Health, Public Health, our hospital sites and the public.”

SIDEBAR

Residents may want to consider what they can do to protect their health and how they and their families will be prepared if or when a pandemic occurs. Basic infection control measures such as washing your hands frequently, covering your mouth with your sleeve or a tissue after you cough or sneeze and staying at home when you are sick are important. You may also want to consider some emergency planning:

- Decide who will take care of the children if schools are closed.
- Plan to limit the number of trips you take to shop. Public transportation routes and times may be limited and gasoline may be in short supply.
- Be prepared to get by for at least a week on what you have at home. Stores may not be open or may have limited supplies.

These are only the start of some issues to consider. If you plan ahead, as the MHA is doing, you will be more prepared for the worst case scenarios if or when a pandemic arrives.

Predictions are being made for a 35 per cent attack rate, in other words, approximately one third of the population being affected – slow downs and shortages are very possible in an economy operating with one third fewer teachers, truck drivers, grocery clerks, etc.

Information adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Health

For more information, visit the Ontario Ministry of Health Influenza Pandemic web site:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/emu/pan_flu/pan_flu_mn.html