



OPFFA

ONTARIO PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

OFFICE

292 Plains Road East
Burlington, ON, L7T 2C6
Ph: (905) 681-7111
Fax: (905) 681-1489

October 13, 2009

The Hon Deb Matthews, Minister
Health & Long-Term Care
80 Grosvenor Street
Hepburn Block, 10th Floor
Toronto, ON
M7A 2C4

BY FAX ONLY

PRESIDENT

Fred LeBlanc
Ph: (613) 328-2195
Fax: (905) 681-1489
Email: fleblanc@opffa.org

EXECUTIVE V/P

Mark McKinnon
Ph: (905) 242-2460
Fax: (905) 681-1489
Email: mmckinnon@opffa.org

SECRETARY TREASURER

Barry Quinn
Ph: (613) 612-8909
Fax: (905) 681-1489
Email: bquinn@opffa.org

All Correspondence to OPFFA Office

PRESIDENT EMERITUS

Patrick DeFazio
136 Darlington Priv., Apt 701
Ph: (613) 791-6623
Email: pdefazio@opffa.org

DISTRICT V/P's

Ernie Thorne, District 1
15 Fieldstone Road
Etobicoke, ON, M9C 2J5
Ph: (416) 571-7753
Email: ethorne@opffa.org

Chris Francescone, District 2
562 Aikins Road
Belleville, ON, K8N 4Z2
Ph: (613) 968-2576
Email: cfrancescone@opffa.org

Mike Pauze, District 3
368 Kribs Street
Cambridge, ON, N3C 3L6
Ph: (519) 276-0819
Email: mpauze@opffa.org

Terry Colburn, District 4
160 Lakeshore Road
St. Catharines, ON, L2N 2V1
Ph: (905) 687-6173
Email: tcolburn@opffa.org

Warren Scott, District 5
41 Parkside Drive, Apt. 302
St. Thomas, ON, N5R 3V1
Ph: (519) 282-1187
Email: wscott@opffa.org

Randy Richards, District 6
21 Victoria Avenue
Sault Ste. Marie, ON, P6A 3J6
Ph: (705) 941-0234
Email: rrichards@opffa.org

Eric Nordlund, District 7
43 Prospect Avenue
Thunder Bay, ON, P7A 5K9
Ph: (807) 627-1709
Email: enordlund@opffa.org

URGNET MEMO RE: H1N1

Dear Minister Matthews:

On behalf of the Executive Board, staff, and entire membership of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association (OPFFA) congratulations on your appointment as Ontario's Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Your appointment comes at a very challenging and exciting time for this Ministry which illustrates the Premier's confidence in your abilities.

Notwithstanding the much publicized challenges currently before you I must bring your attention to an urgent matter respecting the H1N1 virus and the OPFFA.

I have written to this Ministry on two prior occasions (August 25, 2009 & September 28, 2009) respecting the government's approach to the H1N1 vaccine and antiviral.

I received a letter signed by then Minister Caplan on October 5, 2009 regarding the previously mentioned communications with respect to fire fighters being included in the first 'flight' of vaccines for H1N1 across Ontario.

The response stated *"All of the vaccine will not be ready at the same time. The immediate priority will be to target those who will benefit most from immunization, as well as those who care for people most at risk. These priority targets include:*

- persons with chronic medical conditions
- pregnant women
- children 6 months to less than 5 years of age
- persons residing in remote and isolated settings or communities
- health care workers involved in pandemic response or who deliver essential health services



- household contacts or caregivers of those at high risk who cannot be immunized
- populations otherwise identified as high risk”

I draw your attention to the fifth bullet point “**health care workers involved in pandemic response or who deliver essential health services**”. Fire fighters all across Ontario (in particular in the urban areas) respond in conjunction with our partners in the emergency medical services to a wide variety of medical emergencies. In fact medical emergencies are commonly consuming the majority of our call volume. A symptom of H1N1 is respiratory distress which is typically triggers a response from the fire service.

If this strain goes to even a moderate level the impact could be dramatic. First responders will become ill thus the remaining resources will be stretched even further thereby putting a greater strain on the fire service for both fire and medical related emergencies.

While we appreciate that the government has assured us “...that there will be sufficient H1N1 vaccine available in Ontario for everyone who needs and wants to be immunized.” we remain deeply concerned with the clear underestimation and lack of recognition of the fire services’ role within the delivery of essential health services from an emergency response capability.

Recent media coverage clearly shows that the H1N1 virus is having a significant impact in parts of the US and in British Columbia. It is only a matter of time before Ontario is hit with this second wave. I again request that your Ministry reconsider the addition of fire fighters under the guise of the delivery of essential health services and include fire fighters as a “priority target” for the H1N1 vaccine.

Thanks you for your consideration in this matter and we look forward to your response.

Respectfully,



Fred LeBlanc,
President

Cc: Hon Dalton McGuinty, Premier
Hon Rick Bartolucci, Minister of Community Safety & Correctional services
Mr. Pat Burke, Ontario Fire Marshal
Mr. Richard Boyes, President, Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs
Mr. Peter Hume, President Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Mr. Jim Lee, IAFF Canada
Mr. Bruce Carpenter, IAFF 13th DVP