



# OPFFA

ONTARIO PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

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September 28, 2009

The Hon David Caplan, Minister  
Health & Long-Term Care  
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Toronto, ON  
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**BY ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY**

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Dear Minister Caplan:

I wrote to you on August 25, 2009 regarding the concerns associated with the H1N1 virus and its related anti viral and vaccine program. To date I have yet to receive acknowledgment of my communication or a response.

I am writing further as recently the Government of Canada announced its "Guidance on H1N1 Vaccine Sequencing." The guidance and a related news release are attached for your information.

While the government expects there will be enough H1N1 vaccine for all Canadians who want it, the guidance is designed to assist provincial health officials, who will be responsible for vaccination programs once the H1N1 vaccine is available, to ensure that *"those who need it most get it first."*

With this guidance, the federal government has identified groups that may benefit from priority vaccination due to risk of severe illness or in order to minimize "societal disruption." The groups are not ranked by priority, however, the stated purpose of the list is that "Provinces and territories are expected to use the guidance for planning purposes and will interpret it based on local circumstances and realities."

While not ranked by priority, there are clearly two flights identified, and fire fighters are in the second flight which is titled **"Others who will benefit from immunization."** The stated rationale is that fire fighters *"frequently attend emergency health situations with EMS."* With this language the federal officials have overlooked the fact that that keeping fire fighters healthy is a matter of maintaining critical public safety services, along with the fact that fire fighters are commonly first responders on medical calls in particular to the symptoms related to this virus – namely respiratory distress.

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In my previous communication I attached the independent risk analysis which shows that 25-30% of our workforce could become ill and unavailable for duty during the height of a moderate flu pandemic. This would be devastating to the viability of any fire service in Ontario not to mention the associated reduction in emergency response to the public.

Given the fact that the Federal government has allowed provinces to interpret this document for planning purposes I am formally requesting that the Province of Ontario rank fire fighters in first "flight" to receive this vaccine.

With the realities associated with our response to medical emergencies and the likely potentially to be working with reduced staffing levels it is the position of the OPFFA that including fire fighters in the first round of vaccines is a matter of public safety.

Should you wish to meet and discuss this matter further do not hesitate to contact me otherwise I look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Fred LeBlanc', written in black ink.

Fred LeBlanc,  
President

Cc: The Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier  
The 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. Bruce Carpenter, 13th District Vice President, International Assoc. of Fire Fighters  
Mr. Jim Lee, Canadian Director, International Assoc. of Fire Fighters