



# OPFFA

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ONTARIO PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

August 25, 2009

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

Dear Minister Caplan:

I am writing to you regarding an urgent matter that stands to impact the lives and safety of millions of Ontarians. This issue involves the potential inability of fire departments across Ontario to offer critical, life-saving public safety services to the citizens of Ontario in the event of a flu pandemic.

The over 10,000 men and women represented by the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association (OPFFA) protect approximately 78% of the Ontario's population and infrastructure and are first on scene in any kind of emergency, whether it's a fire, medical emergency such as a heart attack or roadway accident, or some other kind of emergency such as a building collapse, natural disaster or terrorist act.

Fire fighters are Ontario's first line of defense. Our members' ability to respond to these emergencies quickly and with adequate personnel and resources is a major determining factor in the survival of citizens involved in these emergencies, as well as the protection of their property and the nation's infrastructure.

The OPFFA is aware that fire fighters, like other front line emergency responders, are not currently in the first group of Canadians under the Federal Government's policy who would receive available antivirals and vaccines in the event of a flu pandemic, whether it is the current H1N1 pandemic or a future pandemic caused by avian or some other influenza type.

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An Association Run For and By The Membership  
Affiliated with the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Ontario Federation of Labour



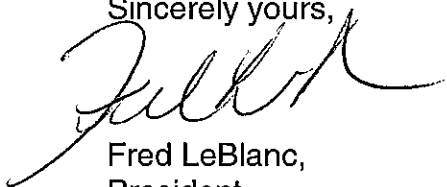
Independent analysis conducted (attached) recently has concluded that without appropriate precautions, **25 to 30 per cent of full-time fire fighters could be unavailable for duty in the event of a flu pandemic.** This would be a disaster for public safety in Ontario. Fire fighting is a labour-intensive operation that requires an adequate number of personnel available in order to adequately protect the public. A fire department cannot function normally and provide adequate protection to the public with this many personnel unavailable. The resulting risk to public safety would be unimaginable.

It is imperative that it becomes a matter of policy that full-time fire fighters are among the **very first** to receive available antivirals and vaccines in a flu pandemic. I urge you in the name of public safety to make Ontario a leader in this regard.

I am aware that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has written to the Federal Health Minister about this same issue. The International Association of Fire Fighters who represents all full-time fire fighters across Canada and the OPFFA agrees wholeheartedly with the concerns they have raised about this issue.

I would like to meet with you at the earliest opportunity to discuss this issue further. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any additional information about our urgent request.

Sincerely yours,



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 13<sup>th</sup> DVP