

TO: Chair and members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. **Receive this report for information.**

Key Points

- After receiving reports of two (2) flu-related deaths of children who attended the same school, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) initiated our Incident Management System (IMS) to open drop-in flu clinics in response to public concern. Communications supported the IMS event by ensuring the public knew:
 - The two (2) deaths were not related even though the children attended the same school.
 - Flu was active throughout the community.
 - The best protection against getting the flu was to get the flu shot at one of WDGPH's IMS clinics or a local pharmacy or health care provider.
- WDGPH received significant coverage on local, regional and national newspapers, radio stations and television networks.
- Social media played a key role in informing residents about the flu clinics and answering concerned parents' questions.
- The week of coverage culminated in a Facebook Live event where Dr. Mercer and Dr. Tenenbaum answered questions live from the public over Facebook.
- The extensive coverage in traditional media was complemented by significant interaction with the public over social media (Facebook and Twitter), demonstrating how WDGPH can use social media platforms to inform the public, motivate them to action (come to a flu shot clinic) and help build an understanding about a health threat in the community.

Discussion

Ensuring messaging from WDGPH is clear and reaches the public via multiple venues is key to building understanding about any current health threat. This approach also counters rumours that cause people to reach the wrong conclusion about how to respond to a health threat.

WDGPH's Communication Department's strategy focuses on getting information out through local media outlets. Because the recent flu event involved the deaths of two (2) children from the same school, media interest was heightened and significant resources were needed to manage media requests and resulting interviews for print, television and radio outlets.

Eventually, this flu event was national news through an interview by Dr. Mercer for *The Globe and Mail* and coverage on CTV, CBC and Global television.

Messages were both distributed and amplified through the use of Facebook and Twitter by WDGPH. Instead of simply receiving the information from news outlets, residents received information directly from WDGPH and were able to ask staff questions directly in real time.

There was significant interaction with the public over social media throughout this flu event. In all of 2017, WDGPH had 7,277 engagements (replies, shares, likes) through our social media accounts. For the one-week period between February 9 and February 18, WDGPH had 1,632 engagements, or 22% of our normal annual total, with the public via social media.

Traditional Media

Media Impressions

Media impressions (how many people potentially read, view or listen to the media coverage) are the standard way to measure the reach of your message on mass media platforms.

Newspapers, television outlets and radio stations keep track of audience size so they can sell advertising. By tracking impressions, WDGPH can estimate how many individuals a media message has potentially reached.

On Friday February 9, WDGPH issued a press release highlighting the fact that two (2) children in the same school had died of the flu but these cases were unrelated and that particular school posed no greater threat for children getting the flu. The flu virus was active in all communities and therefore the chances of getting the flu by attending school were similar to attending any other community function. WDGPH advertised that flu clinics that were planned for the weekend.

By the end of Friday February 9, the message above had over two (2) million impressions on mass media outlets. Significantly, there were 597,599 impressions in local media indicating the message was being heard in the community.

WDGPH's February 9 media release received substantial coverage and led to a CBC KW live interview with Dr. Mercer at 7 a.m. on February 10. This interview then sparked the interest of CTV Kitchener and this news became regional before going national on February 13. The national coverage on CBC, CTV, Global television and an interview by Dr. Mercer with *The Globe and Mail* accounted for just over half of the media impressions garnered between February 9 and February 17.

Flu Vaccination Clinic Media Response and Awareness Mass Media

(including websites)

Measured from February 5, 2018 to February 8, 2018

Data measured includes newspaper circulation and radio and television daily audiences plus estimated unique daily viewers on independent and associated websites.

Date	Local Coverage	Regional Coverage	National Coverage	Other	Sum	Total Coverage
Feb. 9	597,599	1,461,666	56,666	n/a	2,115,931	2,115,931
Feb. 10	67,768	1,457,666	n/a	n/a	1,525,434	1,525,434
Feb. 11	60,168	89,425	942,999	n/a	1,092,592	1,092,592
Feb. 12	119,552	708,766	n/a		828,318	828,318
Feb. 13	59,384	330,833	8,510,000	686,658	9,586,875	9,586,875
Feb. 14	64,538	34,500	n/a	n/a	99,038	99,038
Feb. 15	26,548	34,500	679,899	44,183	785,130	785,130
Feb. 16	39,925	632,933	n/a	n/a	672,858	672,858
Feb. 17	n/a	64,600	n/a	n/a	64,600	64,600
	1,035,482	4,814,889	10,189,564			16,770,776

Social Media

Social media is about engaging the audience rather than just getting the message to them. While the number of impressions (potentially audience size) can be measured, a much better way to see impact is to measure “engagements.” Because Facebook and Twitter posts show up on an individual’s personal phone, tablet or computer WDGPH can measure how many individuals actually engaged with the message by taking such actions as liking or retweeting the message or taking some other action mentioned below.

Social Media Impressions and Engagement

From February 9 to February 18, WDGPH was very active on its two (2) most used social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter. These platforms allow WDGPH to monitor rumours, clarify with facts, answer questions and engage individuals around a specific topic.

Overall, WDGPH had a high level of engagement with the community through social media during this IMS event. Engagements include users liking, sharing (re-posting or re-tweeting a message on their own network), making a comment or asking a question, and clicking a link provided for more information (usually a link to wdgpublichealth.ca was provided). During this flu event, WDGPH created 41 Facebook posts and 31 tweets and received the following:

- 304 messages to WDGPH from Facebook followers;
- 34 tweets received;
- 200 individuals signed up to follow us on Facebook;
- 39 signed up on Twitter (currently have 4,891 followers across those two platforms); and
- 1,441 link clicks to our website for more information.

Facebook Live Event

Another way to engage the community is through Facebook Live. This relatively new application allows anyone on Facebook to interact in real time with the hosts of the live event.

The Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) had been in touch with WDGPH regarding the large number of parents who were concerned about their own children because they heard two (2) children died of the flu in the same school. The UGDSB asked WDGPH to hold a community event where parents could ask questions and receive information about the flu.

Logistically, setting up a town hall, getting people to attend and managing it while running drop-in flu clinics was a daunting logistical challenge from a staffing perspective.

WDGPH set up a Facebook Live event where anyone could tune in from their own home or on their phone to receive information and ask questions directly to Dr. Mercer and Dr. Tenenbaum, who moderated the event.

The Facebook Live event was set for 7 p.m. on February 15. It was advertised on social media and through a press release. The event received a lot of coverage on CTV Kitchener, local radio stations and local papers. CTV did an interview with Dr. Mercer, at Chancellors Way, the day of the event and aired live outside of Chancellors Way for their 6 p.m. newscast.

The event reached 13,279 users (number of individuals who scrolled through, even briefly), it received almost 3,700 unique viewers. Unique viewers are measured by Facebook by including those who stayed for over 10 seconds. The average watch time was 1 minute 20 seconds. This is considered a good amount of time on social media with the average visit to a website or post being 15 seconds according to Facebook. Viewers sent over 80 questions directly to Dr. Mercer and Dr. Tenenbaum. Any question not answered during the event was answered directly by Dr. Tenenbaum the following day over Facebook.

Anyone can go and review the entire broadcast after it is over as it remains on the WDGPH Facebook page for anyone to access.

Conclusion

WDGPH engaged the community during this flu event at a time when there was great public concern because of two (2) children dying of the flu in Guelph. By establishing key messaging early and working with Dr. Mercer and Dr. Tenenbaum, as the key spokespeople, WDGPH was able to engage traditional media through radio, television and press interviews. Local media carried stories about WDGPH flu clinics throughout the week, but most importantly on the first Friday and over the weekend. The results of this public messaging can be seen in that between Friday, February 9 and Friday, February 16, 3342 individuals received the flu shot. Almost 2500 of those vaccinated received their flu shot in the first four (4) days of the IMS event, between Friday, February 9 and Monday, February 12.

Using Facebook and Twitter, WDGPH was able to engage with individuals directly, target its messages, answer questions and engage a community that felt threatened because of the death of two children.

Facebook Live presented an opportunity for WDGPH to receive questions from parents and answer them in real-time. The request to engage the community more directly came from the UGDSB who wanted a town forum where parents could ask questions.

By piloting Facebook Live as an online forum to share information and respond to concerns in real time, WDGPH was able to further amplify important messages and respond to public concerns in a visible way while maintaining service levels in busy flu clinics.

Ontario Public Health Standard

Ontario Public Health Organizational Standards; section 6:11, Communication Strategy

WDGPH Strategic Direction(s)

- Health Equity:** We will provide programs and services that integrate health equity principles to reduce or eliminate health differences between population groups.
- Organizational Capacity:** We will improve our capacity to effectively deliver public health programs and services.
- Service Centred Approach:** We are committed to providing excellent service to anyone interacting with WDG Public Health.
- Building Healthy Communities:** We will work with communities to support the health and well-being of everyone.

Health Equity

Health equity is the condition where everyone can attain their full health potential and are not disadvantaged due to their social position or other socially determined circumstances.

- As per the Ontario Public Health Organizational Standard, Section 6.11, a communication strategy should “Plan for use of multiple modalities to ensure accessibility . . .”
- Through data collection at WDGPH, we know that children from low-income neighbourhoods are less likely to be fully vaccinated. Parents may be working multiple low-income jobs or dealing with other issues such as housing or school that takes the priority off of ensuring their children are vaccinated. WDGPH had an extensive communications reach on local papers, radio and television and by amplifying that message through social media. By using strategic communications, WDGPH was able to inform residents of the threat of flu in the community and the opportunity to use evenings and a weekend to get their children the flu shot.
- Hosting the Facebook Live flu forum gave the public the opportunity to ask questions about the flu and the flu shot from their home computer, tablet or personal phone. Answering one person’s question online may have the effect of providing information sought by many others. The Facebook Live event gave WDGPH the opportunity to engage the community without asking the public to come to an actual venue. The taping of the Facebook Live event remains on the WDGPH Facebook page and can be accessed by parents who couldn’t watch it live because of work or family schedules.

References

None

Appendices

None