



# dialogue

November 16, 2006

A bi-weekly update on issues  
affecting health care in Ontario

**Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan**

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cpip-pclpci/>

**Ontario Ministry of Health  
Pandemic Information**

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/pubhealth/flu/panflu/panflu\\_mn.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/pubhealth/flu/panflu/panflu_mn.html)

## No consensus reached on flu transmission

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### Ministry likely to follow CDC lead on N95 respirators

Initially billed as a “consensus conference,” an Oct 26-27 gathering of international scientists in Toronto was intended to provide guidance on respiratory protection for health care workers. Hosted by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the conference failed to reach its aim of consensus on the weight or importance of various modes of flu transmission.

Despite a lack of definitive proof, strong arguments were made suggesting airborne transmission is not only possible, but an important mode of transmission.

In the wake of the 2003 SARS outbreak, the province has been slow to require N95 respirators in its pandemic influenza plan, insisting surgical masks are sufficient protection. The conference was to settle this question.

Material presented at the conference will also play a role in the drafting of the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan.

Dr. Mark Nikas, Professor of Industrial Hygiene at the University of California, stated tiny respirable particles can be airborne further than one meter from a coughing patient. These particles can also settle on surfaces and be re-suspended in the air.

Lisa Brousseau, Associate professor at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, stated surgical masks should not be considered respiratory protection devices.

The U.S. Centres for Disease Control (CDC) is presently recommending N95 or higher respirators during medical activities

that have a high likelihood of generating infectious respiratory aerosols. The CDC’s interm guidelines also state that N95s are “also prudent for health care personnel during other direct patient care activities,” such as bathing, examination and feeding.

While the conference failed consensus, the meeting did put to rest the Ministry’s claims that its decisions to use surgical masks were scientifically based.

With the PHAC likely to follow the CDC recommendations, the Ministry should change its guidelines.

Initially barring union representatives from the meeting, the PHAC bowed to pressure. Six union representatives were present, including OPSEU’s Lisa McCaskell and NUPGE’s Len Bush.

Discussion from the conference will be summarized and posted on-line in mid-December.

### Ontarians going without needed care

Nearly one in three Ontarians couldn’t afford a needed visit to the dentist or an eye exam according to a recent Vector Poll. One in four went without a prescription drug.

The poll asked the public if, in the past year, they or their family forego any needed health services not covered under government or private insurance.

Dental check-up or care	34%
Eye exam or vision care	28%
Prescription drug	25%
Lab or medical test	15%
Chiropractic care	15%
Physiotherapy	14%
Nursing care	10%

### Ottawa hospital costs \$88 million more

Independent economist Hugh MacKenzie says the newly opened Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre will cost taxpayers \$88 million more as a privately-financed and operated public hospital.

The Ottawa hospital is the first in Canada to be developed, financed, and operated for-profit by a private consortium.

According to documents released by the hospital:

- The initial plan was to cost \$100 million, but by the time the deal was signed, costs ballooned to \$146 million;
- The private financing is 250 basis points higher than the rate government uses to borrow;
- The deal cost \$8.1 million to set up in legal fees and consultants.

“Millions will be siphoned out of the provincial budget that could have gone to doctors, nurses, hospital services and beds,” says MacKenzie, speaking at a news conference hosted by the Ontario Health Coalition.

Approved for Distribution by Leah Casselman, President