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Protecting the Health and Safety of Canadians:

The Centre for Emergency
Preparedness and Response



Canada

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Protecting the Health and Safety of Canadians:

The Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response

Canadians look to their governments for protection from health risks. They expect their governments to be ready to deal with the possible health risks from:

- natural events and disasters such as floods, earthquakes, fires and highly dangerous infectious diseases; and
- accidents or criminal and terrorist acts involving explosives, chemicals, radioactive substances or biological threats.

All levels of government in Canada help to protect the health of Canadians from these threats as part of their efforts to promote health and prevent disease. Local, provincial and territorial authorities do much of that work with federal government support from Health Canada's **Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response (CEPR)**.



CEPR is Canada's central coordinating point for public health security issues. Among its many responsibilities, CEPR:

- develops and maintains national emergency response plans for Health Canada;
- monitors outbreaks and global disease events;
- assesses public health risks during emergencies;
- contributes to keeping Canada's health and emergency policies in line with threats to public health security and general security for Canadians, in collaboration with other federal and international health and security agencies;
- is responsible for the important federal public health rules governing laboratory safety and security, quarantine and similar issues; and
- is the health authority in the Government of Canada on bioterrorism, emergency health services and emergency response.

The CEPR Structure

To achieve its many different goals, CEPR is organized into specialized offices. Each office has specific responsibilities. The doctors, nurses, scientists, other professionals and support staff across CEPR have the expertise to meet Canada's public health security priorities.

The Office of Emergency Preparedness, Planning and Training is responsible for the Centre's overall strategic and management planning. It manages emergency preparedness and emergency response plans and keeps them up to date. It develops and runs exercises to train emergency workers so they are ready to put those plans into action. This office is also responsible for developing and delivering training courses that teach health workers how to respond to emergency situations.



The **Office of Public Health Security** provides information on global and national public health events to Canadian and World Health Organization officials. It administers the *Quarantine Act*. It deals with travel medicine and tropical health issues that affect Canada, including certification of the Yellow Fever immunization clinics. It coordinates Health Canada's national health emergency duty officer system and responses to terrorist events or accidents involving chemical, biological and radioactive substances. The Office is responsible for coordination and management during health emergencies, including the work of field medical response teams.

The **Office of Laboratory Security** develops national policies, guidelines and training programs for laboratories. The goal is to minimize risks to health from substances being used in those laboratories. Researchers and others who want to import micro-organisms that can cause disease in humans require permits from this Office. It inspects and certifies laboratories based on the risk to health associated with their work. The Office is in charge of Canada's national response plan for emergencies involving substances that could harm the health of Canadians.

In a national health emergency or disaster, the **Office of Emergency Services** is responsible for supporting emergency health and social services in the provinces, territories and abroad. It manages the National Emergency Stockpile System (NESS), which includes emergency supplies, and medical and pharmaceutical supplies. The Office is responsible for the Emergency Operations Centre, which responds to calls for emergency assistance from provincial and territorial governments and other parts of the Government of Canada. To ensure that emergency officials across Canada are always ready, this Office develops procedures and training assistance.

Travel Medicine information

The web site at www.TravelHealth.gc.ca provides up-to-date information to travellers and travel medicine professionals on:

- current information on international disease outbreaks;
- immunization recommendations for international travel;
- general health advice for international travellers; and
- treatment and prevention guidelines for specific diseases.

The Centre's **Office of the Executive Director** leads and coordinates CEPR operations by providing:

- administrative and policy direction;
- coordination within CEPR and its management team;
- representation of CEPR to other groups within Health Canada; and
- representation to central agencies in the Government of Canada.

Two scenarios offer examples of how the Centre delivers results for Canadians.

Natural Disasters

The Scenario

Flooding along a major river in Western Canada reaches three larger towns, a First Nations community on a reserve and surrounding rural areas in two provinces. The flood destroys 50 homes and 10 businesses. Emergency officers, health services, police officials and front-line leaders in both provinces respond, but as the flood grows, they call for more assistance.

The CEPR Contribution

The CEPR contribution starts well before the call for assistance. The officials in the flooded area take action based on the principles and concepts shared from local to national emergency plans.

When the call for more direct help comes in, CEPR's Emergency Operations Centre sends two emergency field hospitals, along with extra cots and bedding for emergency shelters within hours. Those supplies come from Canada's National Emergency Stockpile System (NESS). Local public health officials, including the front-line health workers on the reserve, also request specific medical supplies and drugs from NESS to be ready in case of disease outbreaks.

Because of the number of people affected, local medical and health workers need additional assistance to meet the demand for services. After consultation, CEPR sends a field medical response team. The mix of people on that team ensures that needed emergency medical services, counselling and mental health services are available.



A Possible Bioterrorism Threat



The Scenario

A package arrives in the mailroom of an office building. The packaging seems suspicious and some powder leaks from it. People are immediately concerned that this might be a bioterrorism case. They call 911.

The CEPR Contribution

CEPR has developed step-by-step guidance and support for these situations that the local emergency and hazardous materials officials put into action. They keep everyone who was exposed to the package together for possible treatment and inform local health authorities.

A first step is to check if explosives, chemicals or radioactive substances might be in the package. If not, emergency workers may want to test the package for micro-organisms that could cause disease or death. To do that, they send it to a

CEPR-authorized laboratory with the right testing and safety capacities. These laboratories can run tests that normally help to identify the substance within 24 hours.

Sometimes, the package or a sample from the package may go to the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. That laboratory operates with the highest level of security and has the most specialized facilities for this kind of testing in Canada. In almost every case, laboratory tests prove there is no threat. If a threat exists, health and emergency officials have the information and advice they need to take further action.

CEPR manages the Global Public Health Intelligence Network (GPHIN). Health Canada developed this unique “early warning” system in partnership with the World Health Organization. It uses the Web to provide preliminary intelligence on global public health issues.

GPHIN gathers reports on significant events involving public health from global electronic media sources. It provides the information on a “real time” basis, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

GPHIN has a wide scope. It tracks events such as disease outbreaks, infectious diseases, contaminated food and water, bioterrorism, natural disasters, and issues related to the safety of products, drugs and medical devices.

Conclusion

Health Canada's Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response operates in an extremely dynamic environment. New threats emerge or gain prominence. Lessons are learned from Canadian and international experience. CEPR applies all this knowledge to update its plans and operations and to improve its work with its many partners. The result is a continuous effort to assess and be ready to act on threats to the health and safety of Canadians.

More information on Health Canada's work in the area of emergency preparedness is available at:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/epr/index.html>

The CEPR web site can be accessed at:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/epr/centre.html>

Health Canada has the lead role in administering the Federal Nuclear Emergency Plan (FNEP). This Plan establishes the framework that coordinates the federal response to a nuclear emergency. The administration, maintenance, and implementation of this Plan are the responsibility of the Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch.

FNEP addresses:

- *serious accidents at nuclear facilities in Canada, along the Canada/United States border or abroad;*
- *accidents involving nuclear-powered vessels visiting Canada or in transit through Canadian waters; and*
- *other serious events involving the uncontrolled release of radioactivity.*

For more information about FNEP please visit:

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/epr/fed_nuc.html

