

Personal Protective Equipment is a Matter of Life and Death for Emergency Nurses

Personal protective equipment (PPE), including N95 respirator masks, surgical masks, latex gloves, surgical gowns and face shields are critical, yet often overlooked, features of health care in the United States. PPE is the first line of defense for emergency nurses and other health care workers in the fight against contracting infectious diseases such as COVID-19. Without access to appropriate amounts of PPE during infectious disease outbreaks, the lives of front line health care workers, their families and patients are at-risk.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Revealed Dangerous Cracks in the Nation's Supply Chain

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has exposed critical gaps in the ability of our health care system to obtain sufficient quantities of PPE in a timely manner during a pandemic. From the earliest days of the crisis, numerous health care sites including hospitals, outpatient clinics and nursing homes were experiencing shortages of key medical supplies. Some models projected a need for upwards of 300 million N95 masks per month alone. However, the Strategic National Stockpile only had 12 million on hand.

80% of nurses reported being required to **reuse single-use PPE**, like N95 masks.



About **60%** responded this makes them **feel unsafe**.

Furthermore, supply chain issues add to the difficulty of rapidly acquiring or producing what is needed. This not only affects the availability of PPE, but also the diagnostic tests that are so important to detecting the virus and determining its spread. States have been forced to compete against each other, with orders being seized and redirected by federal authorities with little or no explanation. The result is that every day more and more workers are forced to work in risky conditions.

Despite Billions Spent, Emergency Nurses are Still Being Exposed to Infection

Emergency departments across the country have had to resort to drastic measures like using improper or expired equipment and, in extreme cases, have been forced to rely on homemade masks made from bandanas or scarves and gowns made from trash bags. Many emergency nurses have had to reuse PPE well past its expiration date.

Since March, tens of billions of dollars have been allocated in the acquisition or production of needed PPE. Despite this, nurses nationally continue to report suboptimal inventories of PPE. An American Nurses Association survey in late May 2020 revealed that nearly 80% of nurses reported being required to reuse single-use PPE, like N95 masks. About 60% responded this makes them feel unsafe. Nurses have even reported that employers are locking up needed PPE to preserve supplies in anticipation of future spikes in infections as states reopen.

Emergency nurses are putting their health and safety at risk in efforts to care for patients and contain the spread of the virus. It is paramount that they receive NIOSH-approved equipment and the appropriate CDC-recommended supplies. Inadequate protection puts emergency nurses at greater risk of contracting the virus, causing a ripple effect and significantly reducing the capacity of the entire health system.

The Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act (H.R. 6711/S. 3627)

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare gross inadequacies in our critical medical supply chain management. The Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act was introduced to take immediate steps to improve the acquisition, production and delivery of supplies and equipment needed to continue to respond to this pandemic, especially as communities begin to open up and cases are likely to spike again. The bill establishes an Executive Officer for Critical Medical Equipment and Supplies to oversee the production and distribution of equipment and supplies, including PPE. This position would also:

- Receive requests for supplies from states and other authorities
- Make recommendations to the president on exercising the full authority of the Defense Production Act to ensure needs are met
- Direct the distribution of all critical equipment and supplies
- Contribute to the COVID-19 strategic testing plan
- Establish a plan to address the production and supply chain needs related to a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine

Data reporting and other transparency requirements will help ensure that distribution is done in a fair and equitable manner.

House Request: Cosponsor and Support the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act of 2020 (H.R. 6711).

This bill was introduced by Representative Jason Crow (D-CO) on May 5, 2020.

Senate Request: Cosponsor and Support the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act of 2020 (S. 3627).

This bill was introduced by Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) on May 6, 2020.