

States, Doctors Ask Trump to Empty Stockpile of Medical Supplies

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The states hit hardest by outbreaks of the new coronavirus are asking the federal government to tap into the nation's reserve of medical supplies as demand for essentials like masks and ventilators are far higher than the public supply.

California, Washington state, New York, New Jersey, and Ohio have all in recent days asked the Trump administration to tap into the federal Strategic National Stockpile for respirators, masks, gowns, gloves, face shields and other equipment that been in short supply as doctors and hospitals work to contain the spread of Covid-19, the illness caused by the virus.

Some states, such as Washington, have gotten some but not all the supplies they say are needed to contain the virus. Others, such as Ohio, have been waiting weeks for a response.

Emergency medicine doctors say the federal stockpile, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, should be emptied now to aid hospital and health-care providers who are at risk of getting sick themselves if they don't have enough protection such as respirator masks.

"If there's equipment available anywhere we need to use it now, otherwise we risk losing the workforce that's needed to take care of the people who are sick," Anthony Cirillo, a doctor who sits on the board of directors for the American College of Emergency Physicians, said.

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Vice President Mike Pence told reporters Tuesday that the White House is asking construction companies to donate N95 respirators to hospitals and to stop ordering them because they're in such high demand.

The Strategic National Stockpile was started more than 20 years ago and consists of more than \$7 billion worth of vaccines, medicines, protective gear, ventilators, and other kinds of equipment stored in warehouses across the country, according to the Department of Health and Human Services' [website](#).

Federal Response

President Donald Trump said he's advising governors that "it's always going to be faster if they can get them directly" from medical equipment suppliers but that the federal government is ordering "tremendous numbers of ventilators, respirators, masks."

Anthony Fauci, a director at the National Institutes of Health and a member of the White House's coronavirus task force, said Sunday that there were 12,700 ventilators in the national stockpile. However, the Society of Critical Care Medicines estimates there are only 8,900 ventilators for emergency deployment.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention earlier this month moved to allow some doctors to use surgical masks instead of the hard-to-obtain N95 respirators, which are designed to fit closely to a person's face to filter out airborne particles.

As of March 11, the government agency in charge of the national stockpile had shipped more than 135 tons of cargo to support U.S. repatriation efforts and state needs, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

State Needs

However, for states facing growing outbreaks of Covid-19, the federal government hasn't been able to meet their requests.

Washington, which has more than 900 confirmed cases of the illness, including 48 deaths, has made more than 50 requests for supplies from the stockpile, asking for almost 73,000 surgical gowns, 6,350 protective face shields, more than 145,000 respirators, and more than 100,000 gloves, according to the state's Department of Health.

In a March 13 statement, the state said it had received "eight tractor-trailer loads and six courier deliveries of supplies" from the federal government, but didn't specify how much equipment was given to the state.

Gov. [Jay Inslee](#) promised late Friday to "push for more until Washington state has all the tools it needs to protect healthcare workers and first responders."



Chona Kasinger/Bloomberg
Washington Gov. Jay Inslee

Washington's congressional delegation [sent a letter](#) Sunday night to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar warning that the supplies of protective equipment in the state remain inadequate.

Ohio Governor [Mike DeWine](#) [sent a letter](#) last week to Trump asking for the second time in as many weeks for masks, respirators, ventilators and other equipment that's become difficult for hospitals in the state to purchase. A spokeswoman for Ohio's Department of Public Health said Monday they had yet to get any official response from the federal government on the request.

Massachusetts received 75,000 items of personal protective equipment last Thursday, according to a spokeswoman.

Nursing leaders Monday called for the "strategic release" of all state and federal stockpiles to areas hit by the coronavirus.

"Instead of rolling back standards, as the Centers for Disease Control and the American Hospital Association are proposing, we need to substantially increase the supply of the highest standard of protective equipment," Bonnie Castillo, executive director of National Nurses United, a nurses' union, said.

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