

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Robert Kadlec
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar and Assistant Secretary Kadlec,

I write today in regards to the availability of personal protective equipment (PPEs) in response to the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19). There are numerous reports of person-to-person transmission of COVID-19, making access to PPEs for health care providers of paramount concern. Major distributors in the United States have reported shortages of PPEs, specifically N95 respirators, facemasks, and gowns. This has led states and health care providers to reach out to the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) to request resources to support their ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The SNS is designed to improve our country's ability to respond to any serious health threat. Specifically, the SNS manages an inventory of medical supplies and pharmaceuticals, to be available and rapidly delivered anywhere in the United States in response to an emergency health threat. On January 30, 2020, the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern" (PHEIC). On January 31, the Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency (PHE) for the United States to aid the nation's healthcare community in responding to COVID-19. On March 11, WHO publicly characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic. On March 13, the President of the United States declared the COVID-19 outbreak a national emergency and officially activated the SNS to deliver essential response resources to state and local partners on the front lines.

As you know, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) recently requested federal PPE resources from the SNS, which included gloves, gowns, face shields, and masks, and I appreciate the initial shipment of gloves, gowns, face shields that was delivered in response. However, much more is needed. I have heard from nursing homes, black lung clinics

and health departments across my state that are reporting shortages or lack of access to any PPEs and need immediate assistance.

I urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that West Virginia has the resources it needs to contain the virus and prevent its spread. No state is more at risk than West Virginia. We are home to the highest percentage of adults 18 and older at higher risk of serious illness if infected with COVID-19 with 734,590 people. That's more than half (51.1%) of our population. Additionally, we are home to the highest percentage of adults under the age of 60 at higher risk of serious illness if infected with Coronavirus with 233,150 people or 24.9% of our population. We cannot afford to let this deadly disease get a foothold in West Virginia.

It is true that West Virginia still has no confirmed cases of COVID-19, but, with only 84 tests performed, it is likely that public health officials have just not identified the cases we already have in the state. Our health care providers need to be prepared to respond, with proper PPEs at facilities across the state. It is unacceptable for nursing homes and other essential, high-risk facilities to have no face masks or gloves available.

In order to better understand what actions the federal government is taking, or planning to take, to adequately protect our health care providers, vulnerable populations, and families, please provide responses to the following questions:

1. What is the status of the initial SNS shipment to WV DHHR? Please include a detailed breakdown of the materials and quantities of each that were included in the shipment?
2. When could a secondary shipment be supplied to WV DHHR and what materials would be made available? Please include the estimated quantities of each where applicable.
3. What other resources can be provided to health care providers with a severe shortage of PPEs as they wait for SNS supplies to be shipped to their facilities?
4. What recommendations are you providing to Health Care Providers (HCPs) who deal with the most at risk populations, such as nursing homes or black lung clinics, who have no access to PPEs?

Please provide this information no later than March 24, 2020. I appreciated your ongoing efforts to respond to this public health emergency, and I look forward to working with you to save lives in West Virginia and across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator