



## Media Lines

### *PPE Quality and NESS*

- 1. Can you explain why the number of warehouses stocking supplies from the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile was reduced, and whether that led to a reduction in the amount of PPE that was stockpiled by the federal government?**

Canada's National Emergency Strategic Stockpile (NESS) contains supplies that provinces and territories can request in emergencies when their own resources are insufficient, such as during infectious disease outbreaks, natural disasters and other public health events. The purpose of the NESS is to provide surge support to provinces and territories; it is not intended to replace supplies that provinces and territories hold or procure. Provinces and territories are responsible for preparing and maintaining their own supply capacities.

Over the past decade, we have reduced some of the materials included in the NESS. For example, blankets were previously part of the stockpile but are now available through other channels and no longer needed in large supplies through the NESS. As the NESS has modernized, the stockpile has focused on stockpiling strategic medical supplies that are typically not held by provinces and territories. This includes items such as medication and vaccines that require controlled environmental conditions.

Following an independent assessment of the federal warehouse network, the NESS moved from nine warehouse locations across Canada to six to offer the most efficient distribution system without sacrificing response capacity. For example, since the creation of the NESS, Canada's transportation infrastructure has improved, making it easier to maintain the same 24-hour delivery target with fewer warehouses.

The supplies in the NESS are regularly reviewed and supplies are purchased on a regular basis. In January, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) began monitoring the coronavirus outbreak in China and started assessing its NESS inventories and procuring supplies needed to respond to a possible outbreak in Canada.

- 2. Recent media coverage has highlighted that during the week of April 6, Canada received 320,000 swabs from China that were contaminated with mould. What measures are being taken to ensure that this does not happen again? Is there other medical equipment coming from China that could not be used because it does not meet Health Canada's criteria?**

When provinces and territories identified issues with the shipment of swabs in question, the company recalled the product and made a commitment to take corrective action and issue product replacement.

The Government of Canada is looking at options to ensure a secure supply of sterile swabs to support laboratory testing, including options to produce swabs in Canada. The Government of Canada has ordered more than over 11 million swabs, and is supporting provinces and territories in lab testing efforts, including ensuring that the demand for swabs is met.



Personal protective equipment and other medical supplies received by the Government of Canada, whether donated or procured, are verified by PHAC to meet the Government of Canada technical specifications for COVID-19 before they are allocated to provinces and territories. If PHAC cannot account for the quality of equipment or supplies, it will not deploy them for frontline healthcare response. The verification process varies depending on the medical device. For example, KN95 respirators, which are an accepted alternative to N95 respirators, are visually inspected to check for defects in design and construction, and tested to confirm they meet specifications for filtering face pieces. Gowns and surgical masks are visually inspected and tested for fluid penetration.

***IF PRESSED:***

PHAC has received some supplies that do not meet Government of Canada specifications. Although such products are non-compliant for frontline healthcare response, they are subsequently assessed to determine potential use in non-healthcare settings.