



Media lines

PPE Quality and NESS

- 1. Can you explain why the quantities of supplies contained in the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile (NESS) warehouses have been reduced, and whether that has brought about a reduction in the amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) held in storage by the federal government?**

Canada's NESS contains supplies that the provinces and territories can ask for in emergencies when their own resources are not sufficient, such as during infectious disease epidemics, natural disasters, and other public health-related events. The purpose of the NESS is to provide emergency support to the provinces and territories; it is not intended to replace the supplies that the provinces and territories have or procure. The provinces and territories are responsible for preparing and maintaining their own supply capacities.

Over the past decade, we have reduced some of the equipment included in the NESS. For example, blankets were previously stockpiled, but they are now provided through other channels and the NESS no longer needs to contain such large quantities. As the NESS is modernized, it focuses on stockpiling strategic medical supplies that are generally not held by the provinces and territories. This includes such items as drugs and vaccines that require controlled environmental conditions.

Following an independent review of the federal warehouse network, the NESS went from nine to six warehouses in Canada to provide the most effective distribution system without sacrificing response capacity. For example, since the creation of the NESS, Canada's transportation infrastructure has improved, which makes it easier to maintain the same objective of delivery within 24 hours with fewer warehouses.

NESS supplies are regularly reviewed, and supplies are purchased regularly. In January, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) began to monitor the coronavirus epidemic in China, and began assessing its NESS stockpiles and procuring the supplies needed to respond to a possible epidemic in Canada.

- 2. Recent media coverage has emphasized that during the week of April 6, Canada received 320,000 swabs from China that were contaminated with mould. What actions have been taken to ensure that this does not happen again? Is there other equipment from China that could not be used because it did not meet Health Canada criteria?**

When the provinces and territories noticed problems with the shipment of the swabs in question, the company recalled the product and committed to taking corrective action and to replacing them.

The Government of Canada is exploring options to ensure a secure supply of sterile swabs for laboratory tests, including options for producing swabs in Canada. The Government of Canada has ordered more than 11 million swabs and is supporting the provinces and territories in their laboratory analysis efforts, particularly by ensuring that the demand for swabs is met.



Personal protective equipment and other medical supplies received by the Government of Canada, whether donated or purchased, are checked by PHAC to meet Government of Canada COVID-19 technical specifications before being sent to the provinces and territories. If PHAC cannot account for the quality of the equipment or supplies, it will not deploy them for frontline healthcare. The verification process varies depending on the medical device. For example, KN95 respirators, which are an acceptable alternative to N95 respirators, are visually inspected to check for design and construction flaws, and tested to confirm that they meet the filtration specifications for facepieces. Surgical gowns and masks are inspected visually and tested for fluid penetration.

IF PRESSED:

The PHAC has received some supplies that do not meet Government of Canada specifications. Even though these products are not in compliance for frontline healthcare interventions, they are then assessed to determine their potential use in contexts other than healthcare.