



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 National Emergency Strategic Stockpile (NESS) contains supplies that are placed at the disposal of the provinces and territories in emergencies when their own resources are not sufficient, such as during infectious disease outbreaks, natural disasters, and other public health-related events. The raison d'être of the NESS is to provide backup to the provinces and territories; the stockpile is not intended to replace the supplies that the provinces and territories have or procure. The provinces and territories are responsible for coordinating and maintaining their own supply capacities.

Over the past decade, we have reduced some of the equipment stockpiled in the NESS. For example, blankets were previously stockpiled, but they are now accessible through other mechanisms; therefore, the NESS no longer needs to store such a large number of them. As the NESS is modernized, it focuses on stockpiling strategic medical supplies that are generally not held by the provinces and territories, like 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 harming intervention 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.

The NESS supplies are periodically reviewed and purchases are made regularly. In January, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) began to monitor the coronavirus outbreak in China, assess its NESS stockpiles and procure the necessary supplies to respond to a possible outbreak 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 by mould. What actions have been taken to ensure that this does not happen again? Do we need to receive other medical supplies from China that cannot possibly be used because they do 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.



The PHAC examines personal protective equipment and other medical supplies received by the Government of Canada, whether they are donated or purchased, to ensure that they meet Government of Canada COVID-19 technical specifications before the material is forwarded to the provinces and territories. If the PHAC cannot account for the quality of the equipment or supplies, it does not distribute them for frontline healthcare. The verification process varies depending on the medical device. For example, KN95 respirators, which are an accepted alternative solution to replace N95 respirators, are inspected visually for any 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. These products are not in compliance with requirements related to frontline healthcare interventions, but they are then assessed to determine their potential use in contexts other than healthcare.