



## COVID-19 Media Lines

### National Emergency Strategic Stockpile Preparedness and Stock (response to the May 2020 House of Commons appearance)

**Issue Statement:** During Minister Hajdu and Dr. Tam's appearance at the House of Commons on May 22, 2020, concerns were raised as to whether the Public Health Agency of Canada had warned Cabinet in the last decade that the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile (NESS) was not properly funded. There were additional criticisms related to preparedness, supplies and closure of NESS warehouses, which resulted in the disposal of expired personal protective equipment. These media lines have been developed using previously approved messaging to respond to potential questions from media.

#### Key Messages:

- Since 2012-2013, the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile (NESS) budget, including salaries and operating, has consistently been around \$3 million annually.
- In addition, there have been investments made for particular initiatives and medical countermeasures, such as a four-year investment in medical countermeasures against smallpox and anthrax that began in 2015-16. Over the last 10 years, these investments have varied year over year, and have amounted to over \$79 million.
- The NESS was built on the assumption that provincial, territorial and local governments would be prepared for the most common emergencies. Consequently, it was designed to provide health emergency assets when local and provincial and territorial resources were exhausted, and to be the sole provider of certain niche assets required for rare public health emergencies, for example, costly and rarely used vaccines or antidotes.
- Jurisdictions have traditionally sourced personal protective equipment (PPE) directly from known suppliers, and the NESS has historically only carried relatively small amounts.
- The supplies in the NESS are regularly reviewed and purchased on a regular basis.
- The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan is a federal, provincial, and territorial guidance document for the healthcare sector to assist jurisdictions with their emergency planning. The most recent guidance from 2011 recommends that availability of PPE supply should be addressed during pandemic planning, and that stockpiling should be considered. However, it does not specify a certain quantity of supply.
- In January 2020, the Public Health Agency of Canada 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.

- With the unprecedented nature of the current pandemic, the government is providing significant funding as the NESS steps into a much more active and expanded role in procurement.

***If pressed on whether advice related to the NESS was ever provided to Cabinet:***

- Departments and all public servants are bound to uphold Cabinet Confidentiality.

**Question and Answers:**

**Q1. Has the Public Health Agency of Canada ever advised government that the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile was under funded or asked for additional funding?**

PHAC has requested additional funding when required. Over the last 10 years, the additional investments in the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile have varied year over year, and have amounted to more than \$79 million. This includes, for example, incremental investments in antivirals, medical countermeasures against smallpox, anthrax and Ebola, and additional resources, such as pharmaceuticals, to ensure sufficient quantities for mass gatherings, such as for the 2015 Pan American Games and the 2018 G7 Summit.

**Q2. 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 personal protective equipment (PPE) that was stockpiled by the federal government?**

Canada's 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, as the NESS has modernized, the stockpile has focused on 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 in 2013 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.

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### **Q3. How much PPE was discarded in the closure of the three NESS storage facilities?**

The NESS reviews its stock of equipment regularly. When closing a warehouse, material that is of use is transferred to other warehouses and expired material is disposed of in accordance with the Treasury Board *Directive on Disposal of Surplus Materiel*. For example, in 2018 expired items such as gloves, face shields, bandages and survival biscuits were disposed. In 2019, approximately 2 million expired masks and 440,000 expired gloves were disposed of during the closure of the warehouse in Regina. The masks and gloves had been purchased in 2009 and had passed the limit of five years for their use, as recommended by the manufacturer.

While the World Health Organization allows for the donation of PPE, it requires that any equipment be supported by the manufacturer for a minimum of two years. What this means is that equipment must be donated two years before its expiration.

PHAC follows strict guidelines when deploying materials. If PHAC cannot account for the quality of material, it will not deploy it. Even under the current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, where Health Canada guidance allows for the deployment of certain expired PPE, PHAC would examine very closely any equipment that has expired and gone beyond with manufacturers' guidelines.

### **Q4. Does the NESS stockpile follow the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan PPE Guidance?**

The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan is a federal, provincial, and territorial guidance document for the healthcare sector. Its purpose is to assist jurisdictions with their emergency planning.

The 2006 CPIP stated that plans are required to allow for a consistent 16-week supply (i.e. two pandemic waves) of both influenza and non-influenza related materials to address sporadic interruptions of supply chains (e.g. resulting from mail and courier disruptions, border closures, supply limitations).

The most recent guidance from 2011 recommends that availability of PPE supply should be addressed during pandemic planning, and that stockpiling should be considered.

Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for ensuring the provision of medications, supplies, and equipment required for provision of pandemic health care services.

The NESS is intended to provide health emergency assets when local and provincial and territorial resources have been exhausted. It has historically carried only relatively small amounts of PPE.