

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

13 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000223

Question Subject: PPE in the National Medical Stockpile

Type of Question: Written

Senator : Stirling Griff

Question:

1. Approximately 54 million protective face masks were recently secured for the National Medical Stockpile ('the stockpile') including surgical masks; and P2 and N95 respirators. However these, along with other personal PPE are designed for a male template. For women frontline health workers, ill-fitting PPE provides no protection and can actually jeopardise their lives. In April, a nurse at the Royal Adelaide Hospital tested positive for COVID-19 despite wearing the recommended PPE.

Can the Department please provide answers to the following:

(a) Is there a range of sizes of PPE in the stockpile which are suitable for all healthcare workers rather than the small and standard sizes suited to the male face?

(b) What steps are being taken to ensure that all frontline health workers (healthcare, ambulance, aged care, police etc.) have properly fitting PPE and training on how to use it appropriately?

(c) On 1 May 2020, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) announced a post-market review of face masks that are included in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG). This follows concerns about the quality and effectiveness of face masks, being that they may not, or do not, perform as intended. What is being done to ensure the findings of this post-market review are noted?

(i) Will appropriate action be taken to ensure properly fitting PPE is made available to provide the same (and adequate) level of protection for all workers?

(ii) Can the Department advise whether the TGA's review includes a review of the sizing of PPE?

(d) Is the inter-governmental Taskforce that has been setup by the Department looking to procure face masks of a variety of different sizes to ensure they fit the user correctly?

(i) Is the Department doing anything to ensure medical mask manufacturing companies such as Med-Con located in Shepparton in Victoria, are producing masks of various sizes to ensure a proper fit when used?

Answer:

- A. There are two sizes of P2/N95 respirators: regular and small. The National Medical Stockpile (NMS) holds supplies of both sizes.

The Department has procured a range of sizes of gloves and gowns for the NMS. All other items including surgical masks, goggles and face shields are considered by the supplier to be adjustable to fit the wearer.

- B. Advice in relation to the appropriate use and procedure for donning and doffing personal protective equipment (PPE) is available on the health.gov.au website. Additionally, State and Territory Health departments have advice in relation to fitting P2/N95 masks available on their websites.

- C. The Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) review is focused on ensuring that facemasks included in the Australian Register of Therapeutic (ARTG) meet appropriate standards with regard to quality and performance and removing consumer and general use products, that are not medical devices, from the ARTG.

(i) and (ii) The TGA review does not include the assessment of the sizing of PPE. Any complaints received by the TGA in regards to issues with sizing or fit of PPE will be assessed on a case by case basis through the TGA's market vigilance program.

- D. See response to item A.

(i) Surgical masks have elasticated ear-loops or ties which means they are adjustable to fit the wearer.