



June 11, 2020

Honorable Michael R. Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

I am writing in response to many deeply troubling reports—some in the media, others provided by our members—that suggest important, systematic and potentially life-threatening deficiencies in the federal government’s efforts to distribute life-saving PPE to nursing homes around the country.

In your role as director of the Coronavirus Taskforce, I am asking you to personally investigate mounting evidence that FEMA shipments of PPE are deeply delayed, frequently stocked with useless and expired supplies, and delivered in quantities radically insufficient to help protect older Americans from the deadly coronavirus. Further, nursing homes across the country have not received clear and helpful communications about what to expect and when to expect it.

As the newspaper Roll Call [reported](#) this week, “Five months after the pandemic first hit U.S. shores—and after weeks of lockdown and economic collapse to prepare for a surge of cases—critical personal protective equipment such as surgical gowns and masks continues to face a national shortage.”

That’s why it was so ominous to learn in the same story that FEMA’s current planning “hinges on the reusing of N95 masks and surgical gowns, which will increase the risk of contamination.”

The paper adds that, “The pressure to reuse personal protective equipment has disturbed nurses across the country. The news that FEMA plans to meet demand by manufacturing cloth gowns and ‘decontaminating’ N95 respirators is sure to stoke concerns.”

Also deeply disturbing are [leaked internal FEMA](#) documents featuring an assumption that “steadily declining COVID hospitalization rates should reduce daily hospital PPE usage”—even as COVID-19 spikes occur around the country and many experts fear that a second wave of infections is coming.

Moreover, Rear Adm. John Polowczyk said at a Congressional hearing this week that FEMA PPE shipments will [“go through August and into September”](#)—despite your pronouncements at PPE delivery events, and FEMA’s earlier promises to complete deliveries by the end of June.

## Fresh Reporting

Just today, separate reports from the [Wall Street Journal](#), [CNN](#), and [Kaiser Health News](#) confirmed that FEMA's shipments are dangerously and at times almost comically inadequate.

Wrote *Kaiser Health News*: "Some contain flimsy surgical masks or cloth face coverings that are explicitly not intended for medical use. Others are missing items or have far less than the full week's worth of protective equipment the government promised to send. Instead of proper medical gowns, many packages hold large blue plastic ponchos."

Numerous examples support these frightening conclusions:

- Said one nonprofit CEO of the FEMA deliveries: "If we had some of this stuff in use, and had an infection-control survey, I would be afraid they would cite us for insufficient PPE."
- Another noted that gowns received from FEMA weren't acceptable in a patient-care setting: "It's the kind of thing I would use in my garden for tarps."
- Indeed, care providers in **Washington** state literally received large blue tarps intended to serve as gowns—and surgical masks with what appears to be paper strips to wrap around the ears instead of elastic string.
- Another **Washington** administrator called the gowns "glorified garbage bags," noting that they would likely expose the wearer to the virus if the gown had been contaminated.
- Nursing homes in **Massachusetts**, **Kansas** and **West Virginia** reports receiving gowns missing the holes needed to put hands through. "It's like putting a trash bag on," said one administrator. "There's no real place for your hands to come out."
- A **Pennsylvania** nursing home reported receiving "very low low-grade quality" gowns that lacked sleeves and only three days' worth of surgical masks.

As one state official put it: "It would be funny if the stakes weren't so high."

## Direct Evidence From LeadingAge Members

These media accounts are reinforced by numerous alarming reports from LeadingAge's nursing homes across the country that show widespread gaps between what has been promised and what is being received.

### Supplies That are Not Meeting Shortages

- **District of Columbia**: "The amount received was not a weekly supply,
  - Eye protection (goggles, 41; we usually use 70 per week);
  - Surgical masks (shipment was 398, we usually use 3850)
  - Gloves (shipment included 1800; we go through 14,000 per week);
  - Gowns (shipment included 432; we go through 1400 weekly)
  - There was no N95 Masks, Face Shields, Hand sanitizer or wipes received in this shipment."
- In **Iowa**, a nursing home administrator "is a full-time PPE searcher; spends multiple hours a day searching for a variety of PPE."
- **Massachusetts**: "resorting to Amazon for rain ponchos."

### Useless Cloth Masks

Numerous members report receiving cloth masks that can't be used when dealing with COVID-19.

- **Kansas:** "We received 1,000 cloth masks yesterday with no return address, just a Topeka, KS USPS facility. No idea where they came from. Nothing we ordered. And these masks are virtually useless. They are made of t-shirt material with non-stretchy earloops. As CDC likes to remind us too, cloth masks are not true PPE."
- **Missouri:** A nursing home, "received 500 cloth masks that they can't use because their health system requires that staff wear Level 1 and/or Level 3 surgical masks or N95 masks according to PPE protocols."
- **Missouri:** "500 cloth masks which were too small and tough to breathe through, some surgical disposable masks, some gowns, a few safety glasses, and no N95's."
- **Minnesota:** "We received a few hundred of the masks pictured below at a couple of our ND sites from FEMA. As you will see, they are made by Hanes so it is basically a mask made from men's underwear in my opinion. It is certainly nothing our staff can use in the facility."
- **South Carolina:** "Nine members have received Masks, most of which are packs of 500 cloth masks. one member received 96 masks. No other type of PPE."
- **Nebraska:** "2000 white cotton masks that her staff described as tighty-whitey - uncomfortable and unusable."

### Other Useless Supplies

- **California:** "We received masks that had been sitting in storage for years and are past expiration date; we got cloth masks (not PPE): we got N95 masks that were not usable because the elastic broke. So we've got thousands of masks that are not usable, and we have staff who are stapling elastic to the mask frames."
- **Wisconsin:** "The masks shrank. They'd be OK for people with small faces, but not for anyone with a large face....We are trying to figure out a way to use them appropriately."
- **Wisconsin:** "156 plastic gowns (trashbag like things, punch a hole through for heads and arms) -- huge, so large that they're not usable"

Mr. Vice President, I hope you are as appalled as I am by these media accounts and shocking reports from our members. It is unclear if this is a failure of leadership, logistics, communications or all three. But for older Americans, the coronavirus is still ongoing. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, was forced to warn policy leaders and the public this week that the pandemic "[isn't over yet.](#)"

In light of these widespread failures, I do appreciate that, per my [May 21 request](#), that you have not done further photo-ops as FEMA boxes are delivered—since they convey a very misleading perception that all is well, when the reality is quite the opposite.

But on behalf of millions of older Americans who know that the coronavirus threat is not over, I implore you to investigate these reports seriously and thoroughly—and take swift action to ensure they can trust the federal government to serve their interests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Smith Sloan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie Smith Sloan  
President & CEO  
LeadingAge