

MEDIA RELEASE

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Auditor-General's report to Parliament on COVID-19: Allocation, distribution and replenishment of Personal Protective Equipment

The Auditor-General, Mr Rod Whitehead, has tabled his Report on COVID-19: Allocation, distribution and replenishment of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in Parliament today.

The review assessed the effectiveness of the allocation, distribution and replenishment of PPE by the Department of Health and four other agencies during the first 10 months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Tasmania.

Mr Whitehead said, 'Overall, PPE was generally available for use by frontline workers across Tasmanian Government agencies'. While PPE stock levels were below levels recommended prior to the pandemic, agencies obtained necessary stock in a challenging global market where demand greatly outstripped supply. Despite missed opportunities for agency collaboration and the Department of Health being limited in its capacity to perform the planned lead and strategic response role in relation to PPE, agencies responded well to manage the allocation, distribution and replenishment of PPE.

Mr Whitehead highlighted that, at the beginning of the pandemic, stock levels and the quality of stock held were not known due to shortfalls in record keeping. In addition, the level of stock held in the Emergency Medical Stockpile was below the level recommended by Department of Health's own pandemic plan. This stock had to be manually checked before distribution with a small amount unfit for use.

Prior to the pandemic, at a whole-of-government level, there were planning documents that considered the use of PPE during a pandemic. Due to resource constraints and the extent of the emerging public health emergency, the Department of Health and in particular Public Health Service, had limited capacity to lead the response in relation to PPE and provide guidance on its use to other agencies at the start of the pandemic.

The Report noted Department of Health subsequently developed effective and detailed controls to better understand its PPE stock levels, demand and replenishment needs and it significantly increased its PPE stock between April and August 2020. The Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management also maintained a central PPE store, while agencies requiring less PPE developed effective procedures appropriate to their more limited needs. Despite the difficulties in procuring stocks, sufficient PPE was available to meet agencies' needs.

Mr Whitehead made four recommendations that build on lessons gained from the current emergency response and support improvements in the allocation, distribution and replenishment of PPE to meet possible future requirements.

The complete Report can be downloaded from www.audit.tas.gov.au.

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Further information contact Rod Whitehead, Auditor-General, (03) 6173 0900