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Audit Office

COVID-19: Allocation, distribution and replenishment of PPE

Report of the Auditor-General
No.13 of 2020-21





Review objective

The objective of the review was to express a limited assurance conclusion on the effectiveness of the allocation, distribution and replenishment of personal protective equipment (PPE) by public-sector agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic in Tasmania.

Agencies reviewed:

- Department of Health (DoH)
- Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM)
- Department of Communities Tasmania (Communities Tasmania)
- Department of State Growth (State Growth)
- Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE)



Scope

- The review looked at plans that were already in place to manage PPE supplies in the event of a pandemic, and the modification of those plans in response to COVID-19.
- Timeline: March 2020 to February 2021.
- The review did not examine guidance or decisions on the use of PPE in clinical and non-clinical settings, nor did it specifically consider the quality of PPE.



Review criteria

1. Were governance arrangements relating to PPE effective?
2. Were controls over physical PPE stock held effective?
3. Were controls over the allocation and distribution of PPE effective?
4. Was the replenishment of PPE during the pandemic managed effectively?



Qualified conclusion

- Except for the matter below, nothing has come to the attention of the Auditor-General that causes him to believe that, in all material aspects, the allocation, distribution and replenishment of PPE, during the first 10 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, was not effective, as evaluated against the review criteria.
- For two agencies prior to and at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, controls over physical PPE stock held were not fully effective because:
 - stock records did not accurately record the quantity of PPE stock held at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - there were shortfalls in recommended levels of PPE stock required to be held for a pandemic response
 - there were instances where PPE stock was not fit for use due to expiry past its use by date or quality deficiencies.

These matters were quickly rectified by the agencies once identified.





Introduction



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Main types of PPE

- PPE is an integral part of infection control.
- Communicable Diseases Network Australia has developed national clinical guidelines for COVID-19, as part of its Series of National Guidelines (SoNGS). These also provide clinical guidelines at a national level on PPE usage.



What existed prior to the pandemic

- *Emergency Management Act 2006*
- Pandemic plans
 - SSEMPs
 - TPHEMP
 - THAPPI
- Medical stockpiles
- Agency stockpiles



Findings



Effectiveness of governance arrangements relating to PPE

- DoH and Public Health Service role in providing agencies PPE and guidance could not be implemented at the beginning of the pandemic due to capacity limitations
- Agencies made their own arrangements for the allocation, distribution and replenishment of PPE
- Resulted in limited collaboration between agencies at the beginning of the pandemic (but some PPE was shared)
- State Growth asked to assist with access to PPE for non-health organisations

Effectiveness of controls over physical PPE stock

- Challenges exist in determining the PPE stockpile required in preparing for a pandemic
- 6 weeks recommended level of PPE stock in THAPPI
- Limited visibility over what was in the medical stockpile
- Shortcomings in record keeping regarding level of stock held compared to actual stock held
- Quality issues with stock held

Effectiveness of controls over physical PPE stock

- PPE stock held in the State Stockpile as at 31 January 2020

Item description	Unit	Quantity	Stock availability (based on normal needs)
N95/P2 masks	Single units	70 500	6 weeks/ 5 days
Surgical masks	Single unit	82 000	6 weeks/ 4 days
Gowns	Single units	11 700	2 days
Face shields	Single units	144	No BAU data
Safety frames and lenses	Single units	7 800	No BAU data
Hand hygiene solution	Litres	250	1 week

Source: DoH

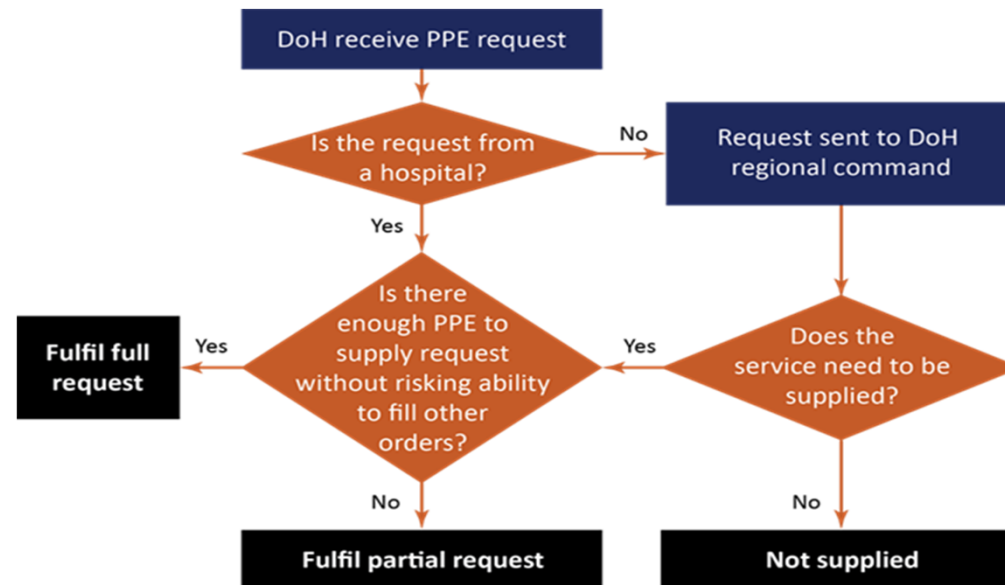
- Stock held by other agencies

Effectiveness of controls over physical PPE stock

- Mechanisms to control PPE stock levels broadly improved over time
- PPE stocks were generally stored in suitable and secure environments

Controls over the allocation and distribution of PPE

- Guidelines for the allocation of PPE improved as the pandemic progressed
- DoH's PPE allocation decision framework:



Controls over the allocation and distribution of PPE

- Agencies mostly had appropriate stock control measures in place to ensure PPE was allocated effectively
- Agencies effectively distributed PPE to meet local needs



Management of the replenishment of PPE during the pandemic

- A more flexible approach to procurement assisted agencies secure sufficient PPE
- Quality control procedures existed and were improved to ensure PPE was fit for use, but procedures not always effective
- Modelling helped improve understanding of PPE needed as the pandemic progressed
- Stock systems improved with triggers introduced to identify when PPE stock had to be replenished

Management of the replenishment of PPE during the pandemic

- Replenishment of PPE stock was broadly effective
- PPE in the State Stockpile as at 1 April 2020 and 17 August 2020

PPE Type	1 April 2020	17 August 2020	% Change
N95/P2 masks	114 374	217 171	90%
Surgical masks	104 898	11 168 810	10 547%
Alcohol based hand rub (litres)	251	20 209	7 965%
Gowns	118 705	626 419	428%
Gloves	1 823 000	8 281 988	354%
Goggles	13 400	1 139 950	8 407%
Face shields		169 509	N/A
Eye protection		88 252	N/A
Surgical caps		3 518 840	N/A
Shoe covers		27 838	N/A
Coveralls		16 424	N/A

Source: DoH and TAO. Note: Unless otherwise indicated quantity is in individual units



Management of the replenishment of PPE during the pandemic

- PPE stock in DPFEM's central store as at 2 April 2020 and 31 August 2020

PPE Type	Unit of measure	2 April 2020	31 August 2020	Change %
Sanitiser	Litres	150	1 781	1 087
Surface sanitiser	Litres	1 440	630	(56)
Hand sanitiser	Litres	71	1 009	1 321
Hand wash	Litres	0	220	N/A
Surface wipes	Canisters	98	266	171
Surface wipes	10 packs	0	10 527	N/A
Gloves	Boxes	1 679	3 409	103
Disposable masks KN95	Each	0	102 775	N/A
Face Masks ¹	Boxes	159	474	198
Safety glasses	Each	2 029	3 245	60
Coveralls	Each	375	5 054	1 248
Mask kits	Each	850	660	(22)
Honeywell masks	Each	34	33	(3)



Source: DPFEM
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Management of the replenishment of PPE during the pandemic

- Creation of a PPE stockpile for non-health essential service providers will further improve access to PPE



Recommendations



Recommendations

- Whole-of-government and agency plans are refreshed to strengthen guidance on the allocation, distribution and replenishment of PPE.
- Agencies develop plans for greater collaboration for sharing of expertise and resources across departments with regard to PPE.
- Agencies model the future demand for PPE in a pandemic, maintain stock levels proportionate to their needs and ensure visibility of the type and quantity of PPE held.
- Agencies regularly check and refresh PPE stocks in accordance with plans and manufacturers' directions to ensure PPE remains usable.



Responses



Responses

- Responses were received from the:
 - Secretary for Communities Tasmania
 - Secretary for DoH
 - Secretary for DPIPWE
 - Secretary for DPFEM
 - Secretary for State Growth
- All five departments accepted the four recommendations contained in the report

