



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF  
OCCUPATIONAL AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pence  
The Vice President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: COVID-19 - Supply and Distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Dear Mr. Vice President:

On behalf of the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM), I am writing to you, in your capacity as the Chair of the Coronavirus Task Force, to request that the White House immediately appoint a senior Administration official to the Coronavirus Task Force specifically to oversee and coordinate the personal protective equipment (PPE) supply and distribution efforts. The appointment of such an official would provide Governors, health care facilities, and health care workers a direct point of contact to the person who can direct critical equipment and supplies to the facilities and workers who need them most.

ACOEM is a national medical society representing 4,500 occupational medicine physicians and other health care professionals devoted to promoting optimal health and safety of workers, workplaces, and environments. The College is dedicated to improving the care and well-being of workers through science and the sharing of knowledge. From this perspective, ACOEM offers the following insights for your consideration.

U.S. Health care providers, first responders, and health systems currently face severe shortages of PPE, like N95 respirators, that will leave many insufficiently protected amid this outbreak. We are receiving reports of PPE workarounds that some have resorted to, such as spraying their masks with bleach at the end of each day and hanging them up at home to dry. While taken out of necessity, such workarounds compromise the protection that PPE is designed to provide.

However, the fundamental problem we are facing at this time is a lack of coordination for getting existing PPE supplies to the health care workers most at risk from shortages

in a timely manner. This situation threatens to quickly undermine our most important national resource in the fight against COVID-19, our front-line health care workforce.

Millions of respirators are still being held in the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), according to officials with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. However, these respirators are being rationed and often not getting to facilities experiencing the most significant shortages in a prompt manner. The procedures for acquiring the needed equipment are opaque and differ from state to state.

Meanwhile, there is no apparent coordination to ensure that newly manufactured respirators and other equipment are being distributed to the highest priority areas as they become available. This life-saving PPE must be directed to the facilities most in need, and this requires a higher level of coordination than now exists.

Just as the President appointed Admiral Giroir to untangle the issue of access to testing, this critical problem requires dedicated leadership to ensure that respirators and other PPE are provided expeditiously to health care facilities, health care workers and first responders.. Without this kind of leadership, health care workers, like many of ACOEM's members, will be left unprotected, at risk, and unable to do their jobs, putting our entire public health system at risk.

Thank you for your continued leadership in combatting the spread of COVID-19 and for your attention to this urgent matter. Please do not hesitate to contact Patrick O'Connor, ACOEM's Director of Government Affairs, at 703-351-6222 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Frangos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen A. Frangos, MD, MPH, FACOEM  
President