



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

APR 27 2020

The Honorable Abby Finkenauer  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Finkenauer:

Thank you for your letters to President Trump and Secretary Azar regarding the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. I am responding on their behalf.

We understand your concerns and the need for timely updates on the pandemic. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—along with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and our federal, state, and local partners—are working around the clock to implement an aggressive response to protect Americans from this public health threat. Within HHS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, and other agencies and offices play critical roles in addressing COVID-19 by slowing and mitigating the spread of the virus, assisting repatriated Americans, protecting the supply of food, drugs, and medical devices, developing therapeutics and vaccines, supporting the medical workforce, and ensuring access to care. Together, HHS, the White House Coronavirus Task Force, and other federal partners are putting the full weight of the federal government behind fighting this disease.

On January 29, 2020, the President announced the formation of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, which is composed of subject matter experts from the White House and several U. S. government agencies. It includes some of the nation's foremost experts on infectious diseases and is leading the Administration's efforts to monitor, contain, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while ensuring that the American people have the most accurate and up-to-date information to protect themselves and their families.

HHS's infectious disease and public health experts are dedicated to an around-the-clock response to protect the American people. Our response to COVID-19 is built upon decades of experience with prior infectious disease emergencies including responses to SARS, MERS, Ebola, and pandemic influenza. HHS and its federal partners work alongside our nation's governors and their staff; state and local public health officials; mayors; and county, territorial, and tribal leaders to ensure federal support of local response efforts. In addition, HHS officials coordinate with state health departments and epidemiologists to collect information on COVID-19 and to provide additional assistance as necessary.

The public health response to COVID-19 is multi-layered and includes aggressive mitigation activities. The Task Force and HHS have worked closely with state and local leaders in hot spot COVID areas and around the nation to develop these strategies, such as social distancing measures, expanding sick leave and telework, and practicing individual protective measures (e.g., hand washing and face covering). Our goal continues to be slowing the spread and transmission of the virus within the United States. The Department is working in close coordination with our federal, state, and local partners and the private sector to maximize the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE), life-saving medical devices, and diagnostic tests. HHS and its federal partners are developing and sharing guidance documents, testing specimens, and assisting state and local public health departments in their efforts to combat COVID-19. We are also educating the public and medical community through coordination with our federal and global partners to disseminate the most up-to-date information.

Protecting healthcare personnel from COVID-19 is essential to the resilience of our healthcare system. PPE is an important component of infection prevention and control. During some past public health responses, U.S. manufacturers and distributors of PPE have experienced challenges meeting large, unexpected increases in demand. As part of HHS's response to COVID-19, the agency is in regular contact with public and private partners, including manufacturers, distributors, and end users (e.g. health care systems, outpatient providers, and public health officials). ASPR is a member of an interagency task force, headed by FEMA, which continuously monitors and provides supplies to states and localities and assesses the necessity to invoke Executive Branch tools, including the Defense Production Act, to meet operational needs.

During this public health emergency and global pandemic, HHS and its federal partners are providing regular press and congressional briefings to keep policymakers and the public up-to-date on rapidly evolving developments. We hope that you and your staff take advantage of these opportunities to get answers to your most pressing questions. We appreciate your partnership and support as we come together as a nation to fight this latest public health threat.

Thank you again for the work you do to protect the American people and for your interest in this ongoing response. HHS remains committed to doing our part to help save lives and combat the outbreak. We encourage you and your constituents to visit the U.S. government's dedicated COVID-19 website [www.coronavirus.gov](http://www.coronavirus.gov) for the latest and most up-to-date information, resources, and guidance. If you or your staff have additional concerns, please contact the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Legislation at (202) 690-7627. A copy of part of this response will be sent to the co-signers of your letter.

Sincerely,



Eric D. Hargan