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Ministry of Health:
Management of
personal protective
equipment in
response to
Covid-19



an independent look at how the Ministry has been managing both the national reserve of PPE, and the supply of PPE during the pandemic.

In April 2020, I agreed with the Ministry to independently review the Ministry's management of PPE during the early stages of the country's response to Covid-19.² We chose to do a relatively rapid review given the currency of the issues and the high level of public interest in PPE.

This has meant that we have carefully targeted the scope of our work. We were also aware that the agencies we were reviewing needed to prioritise their resources on the Covid-19 response rather than on our review.

I will want to consider other matters about the Government's response to Covid-19 in the future, and I will report on these separately.

What we found

The Ministry and DHBs had planned for a national health emergency. The Ministry and DHBs maintain a strategic national supply of critical clinical items, including PPE, to ensure health services have continued access to them during large or prolonged emergencies that generate unusual demands on normal stocks or supply chains. However, there were gaps in the planning about how PPE would be procured and distributed to mitigate the risk of shortages.

The Ministry did not regularly review DHBs' plans to ensure that they were kept current and that they were well aligned with the Ministry's overall plans. We found some misalignment in the plans about roles and responsibilities for both planning for, and providing PPE in a pandemic, which led to confusion.

The gaps in the planning also meant that the Ministry was not well positioned to ensure that PPE was available in enough quantities throughout the country to meet the demand caused by the pandemic.

The health and disability system is semi-devolved, with distributed responsibilities and often complex arrangements between the Ministry, DHBs, and other organisations. The Ministry is responsible for monitoring and forecasting usage of the national reserve of PPE, and prioritising and allocating supplies when needed.

However, in early February 2020, the Ministry did not know what PPE stock the DHBs held in their reserve supplies or have a system to forecast demand. The devolved system of managing and distributing PPE stock for operational use was not able to manage the increased flow of stock needed during the Covid-19 response, and DHBs identified that some of the national reserve stock DHBs held had expired.

² For the purposes of this report, when we talk about PPE, we mean masks (standard surgical and N95 masks), goggles, face shields, gowns, aprons, and gloves.