

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Prioritization and Distribution for COVID-19 in King County

November 16, 2021

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### Overview

The demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect people from COVID-19 has caused supply shortages worldwide and made it challenging for King County residents to meet their PPE needs. King County works with federal and state partners to address requests for medical-grade PPE. This includes items like medical face masks, N95 respirators, goggles, gowns, gloves, and hand sanitizer. However, PPE continues to be a limited resource and can be hard to attain.

Recently, more vendors have items like hand sanitizer and surgical masks in stock and can fulfill small orders. Other items – for example, N95s and gloves – can still be hard to find.

### How are we making decisions about how PPE is allocated?

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) [sets the priority](#) for how counties can provide PPE purchased with public money to their community. Facilities and agencies in need of PPE are organized into tiers. The highest priority is given to the following Tier 1 healthcare settings including:

1. Hospitals, including psychiatric hospitals
2. Emergency Medical Services
3. Long term care facilities and hospice centers
4. Alternate care facilities
5. All hospitals for emergent surgeries, tuberculosis (TB) patients, etc.
6. All public health agencies for outbreak investigations

These healthcare workers have the most risk of exposure to COVID-19 and work with patients at the highest risk for severe health outcomes. Providing PPE to these individuals may also help to prevent healthcare workers from getting sick and allow clinics and hospitals to stay operational.

Once Tier 1 orders are filled, DOH has prioritized Tier 2 organizations such as other healthcare facilities with COVID-19 cases (congregate settings, behavioral health residential facilities, outpatient clinics), COVID-19 test sites, jails, crisis responders, medical examiners, and law enforcement agencies. If there is still PPE available, the next tier (Tier 3) is for healthcare and congregate settings without confirmed or suspected cases, such as opioid treatment programs, home health services, childcare centers, and higher education.

### Who is eligible to order PPE through King County EOC?

Organizations that fit into the state's three tiers can [order supplies](#) from the King County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) if they are unable to buy items through their regular vendors and can reduce PPE use through conservation strategies.

Orders will be prioritized based on [DOH's guidance](#) and reviewed by Public Health to recommend how much of each item to give out to each requester based upon how much is ordered, estimated daily usage, estimated COVID-19 cases in that setting, available supply, and the people served by the requesting agency, and other factors. Public Health tries to make the best decisions in applying DOH guidance for PPE distribution based on available data.

DOH has decided that as of November 1, 2021, regular PPE orders will be discontinued and the State’s PPE supply will only be distributed in extraordinary situations; these include when supplies are unavailable through regular supply chains, when shipping delays cause an insufficient level of PPE, and when urgent needs arise that cannot be addressed through other means.

King County has a supply of PPE that will be used to supplement the materials received from the State for as long as PPE supplies last. After the King County PPE supply is depleted, orders will only be filled under the extraordinary circumstances described above, and so all facilities and agencies should establish a regular PPE supply chain.

**How much of the PPE orders are we able to fill?**

This changes from week to week and depends on what supplies are shipped to the King County EOC by the State, what the county can buy, or what we have received through donations. The table below summarizes the number of items ordered and distributed for 547 requests during the month of October 2021.

Tier	Type	Item	Requested	Allocated	Percent
1	Health Clinic (General, Behavioral, Dental)	Gloves	17000	17000	100
1	Health Clinic (General, Behavioral, Dental)	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	14000	13500	96
1	Health Clinic (General, Behavioral, Dental)	N95	1040	1040	100
1	Home Health/Home Care	Face Shields	80	80	100
1	Home Health/Home Care	Gloves	15600	15700	101
1	Home Health/Home Care	Gowns	185	190	103
1	Home Health/Home Care	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	5200	5200	100
1	Long Term Care Facilities	Face Shields	11951	11954	100
1	Long Term Care Facilities	Gloves	1034174	1034000	100
1	Long Term Care Facilities	Gowns	68329	43428	64
1	Long Term Care Facilities	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	244021	231600	95
1	Long Term Care Facilities	N95	68325	68640	100
2	Congregate setting (e.g. shelter)	Face Shields	30	30	100
2	Congregate setting (e.g. shelter)	Gloves	10400	10400	100
2	Congregate setting (e.g. shelter)	Gowns	42	22	52
2	Congregate setting (e.g. shelter)	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	1220	1250	102
2	Health Clinic (General, Behavioral, Dental)	Face Shields	403	409	101
2	Health Clinic (General, Behavioral, Dental)	Gloves	436308	420200	96

Tier	Type	Item	Requested	Allocated	Percent
2	Health Clinic (General, Behavioral, Dental)	Gowns	18077	11076	61
2	Health Clinic (General, Behavioral, Dental)	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	105935	105100	99
2	Health Clinic (General, Behavioral, Dental)	N95	18596	18680	100
2	Jails	Gloves	1600	1600	100
2	Local Gov't, Not Public Health	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	900	800	89
3	Child Care	Face Shields	31	31	100
3	Child Care	Gloves	16940	16800	99
3	Child Care	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	14601	9850	67
3	Disability Services	Face Shields	35	35	100
3	Disability Services	Gloves	1800	1700	94
3	Disability Services	Gowns	350	300	86
3	Disability Services	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	100	100	100
3	Educational Org	Gloves	18200	17900	98
3	Educational Org	Gowns	10	10	100
3	Educational Org	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	2832	2800	99
3	Equity Outreach Org	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	1200	600	50

Note: % filled is likely a slight undercount since it does not incorporate any requests that were filled with an alike item. For example, using large gloves to fill requests for extra-large gloves when the latter are unavailable (or swapping latex for non-latex). Similar situations occur for gowns.

During October, the King County EOC was able to fill about 100% of gown requests, 99% of non-latex glove requests, and 100% of N95 requests to eligible facilities. Only certain facilities are eligible to receive N95s and this percentage reflects only eligible requests.

### Emergency Requests

During emergency situations when a facility is dealing with active cases and almost out of PPE, the King County EOC will fill emergency requests for PPE in addition to the regular ordering process. During the month of October, King County EOC filled 20 urgent requests from long term care facilities. The table below summarizes the PPE items given out for urgent requests for the month.

Tier	Type	Item	Allocated
1	Long Term Care Facilities	Face Shields	1065
1	Long Term Care Facilities	Gloves	20000
1	Long Term Care Facilities	Gowns	6630
1	Long Term Care Facilities	Mask (e.g. Procedural)	300
1	Long Term Care Facilities	N95	6900

## **How are we ensuring PPE is equitably distributed to communities who are disproportionately impacted by the disease?**

Public Health's PPE allocation strategy is informed by its Equity Response Team and the Pandemic and Racism Community Advisory Group. Their recommendations have helped Public Health work within existing DOH guidance to better address health disparities. Public Health continues to work to improve accessibility and awareness of PPE resources, modifying its internal strategy to prioritize agencies serving communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, and conducting targeted outreach with partners qualifying for medical PPE. The King County EOC continues to be a key partner in efficiently fulfilling PPE orders once approved by Public Health.

## **Gaps and Challenges**

There continue to be challenges and gaps in PPE allocation that we're working to address. These include:

- Ensuring adequate supplies for eligible organizations while case counts in Washington are high.
- Delays in vendor shipments of certain items.
- Fewer supplies available from the State
- Ensuring enough PPE for community vaccination sites.
- Outreach and technical support to partners who may have difficulty with the ordering process, such as providers with limited English proficiency.

## **When and how are PPE policies updated?**

King County updates its internal PPE distribution processes when any of the following occur:

- Changes of the DOH's Tiering system
- Changes in the availability of PPE through commercial vendors
- Changes in statewide or local social distancing measures
- Changes in how eligible groups are using PPE, such as facilities reopening to non-critical services
- Updates to epidemiological information that may impact King County's control and mitigation strategies, such as data on higher rates of illness and death among communities of color

When significant changes are needed in local PPE allocation policies, Public Health will use a data-driven approach, engage stakeholders, and reach consensus when updating the county strategy.

## **Transparency and Accountability**

We understand the shortage of PPE causes deep concern, stress, and difficulty for all essential workers as they continue to provide services and care for individuals. King County is actively working with industries and the State to increase production and public procurement. We are committed to providing a transparent and fair process for allocating PPE and working to ensure distributions are done so in a manner which does not reinforce existing health disparities.