Audit Finds US National Stockpile "Was Not Equipped" for the Pandemic

Although the US Strategic National Stockpile—a collection of medications, medical devices, and vaccines, among other tools—distributed supplies such as personal protective equipment within the first 3 months of 2020, its ability to respond effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic fell short due to internal and external factors, according to an audit conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Inspector General. Due to these factors, "the Stockpile could not meet demand and was not equipped to handle the COVID-19 pandemic," the investigators concluded.

Several external factors limited the stockpile's effectiveness, ranging from reliance on foreign supply chains to a past focus on responding to influenza outbreaks and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incidents. Internal factors that were outside the stockpile's control, including funding that hasn’t kept pace with its expanded role, also decreased its effectiveness, according to investigators. They also cited the absence of an annual review and implementation plan and a breakdown in communication when the lead federal agency response shifted early in the pandemic from HHS to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. – Emily Harris

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Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.