

U.S. hospitals warn of severe shortage of medical supplies as pandemic rages

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Medical workers attend to a COVID-19 patient. (Photo by Reuters)

New York, February 15 (RHC)-- Hospitals around the United States warn that they are facing a severe shortage of crucial personal protective equipment (PPE) and other COVID-related medical supplies that could complicate testing and vaccine programs.

Data on the use of PPE and other medical items analyzed by Premier, a health care consulting company, revealed that demand for COVID-19 testing and treatment has reached the highest level since the pandemic began last year, according to a report by The Hill.

The data, gathered between May 2020 through January 2021, was supplied by 50 health care systems across the United States. Officials in several states first began to sound the alarm about shortages of PPE last March, with reports emerging that frontline health care workers were battling the virus without proper personal protection.

Among the items seeing the highest demand due to a surge in hospitalizations through January is sterile water, which is used in many injections including the Remdesivir treatment that former President Donald Trump received as part of his COVID-19 treatment. Usage of sterile water is up 350 percent from last May while hospital inventories have shrunk by half, according to Premier's data.

Demand is also soaring for pipette tips and micro pipettes, items that are used during the COVID-19 laboratory testing process. Usage of pipette tips increased by about 100 percent during the holiday season in November and December before falling slightly in January.

Hospital systems have warned that these supplies are increasingly more difficult to come by, with the average delivery time for pipette tip orders jumping from a few days to nearly a month. Premier said that some shortages were caused by the wave of panic-buying that gripped the country early last year as the first lockdown measures were enforced.

"What was correlated ... was the request for supplies and the stock market volatility index," a Premier spokesperson told The Hill. "In other words, buying was more linked to perceived, rather than real, need. And even the perception of need is enough to trigger panic-buying that leads to shortages."

Hospitals around the country are also facing challenges in acquiring necessary supplies to administer COVID-19 vaccines. "What has become a more pressing issue for our members, even more so than improving access to the low-dead-space syringes, is the need for vaccine," the Premier spokesperson said.

"Despite increases in overall distributions to jurisdictions around the country, our members are often reporting steady or declining allocations of vaccine that is making it very difficult for them to continue or expand vaccination efforts in the communities that they serve."

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