

Premier's Weekly COVID-19 Call Summary

March 11, 2020

- The healthcare supply chain remains unquestionably strained as providers continue to manage business as usual as well as new cases of COVID-19.
- Currently, the categories in which members are experiencing the most difficulty accessing supplies include N95 masks, ear loops, hand sanitizers, COVID-19 testing swabs and reagents, PAPRs and gowns.
- Further compounding this issue is the fact that Russia, France and Germany have halted all exports of personal protective equipment (PPE). This is in addition to the embargoes already in place by China, India, Taiwan, Thailand and South Korea.
- In the case of masks, some relief does appear to be on the horizon.
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – As of March 10, the CDC has revised its guidance on masks and respirators. Personnel should continue to wear facemasks and eye protection while providing care to known or suspected COVID-19 patients, however, a respirator such as an N95 respirator is only required during high-risk procedures. Industrial N95 masks that are approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and certain expired N95s are also allowed.
 - The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) – To go along with the CDC's revised stance, CMS has temporarily waived annual fit testing for respirators, which will avoid wasting masks used in the annual validation. Providers still need to fit-test new employees and new types of masks.
- For other healthcare items, Premier's data indicates that more than 1,800 unique stock-keeping units (SKUs) have been placed on allocation from distributors. It's important to remember that allocation does not necessarily indicate a shortage. However, these allocations could affect the quantities supplied and/or make future ordering more challenging.
- Among non-acute providers, about half of our member facilities do not have an ordering history for PPE and, with market allocations, do not have a source for these products.
- Premier's team is working around the clock to learn more about these allocations and how long they will last, and identify alternative sources for our members.
- We continue to advise all members to follow CDC-recommended conservation protocols for PPE and to be judicious with supply orders for the foreseeable future.
- In addition, public health officials also estimate that the incubation period for COVID-19 is estimated at four days, but could range from two to 14 days. During this time, patients may be asymptomatic, yet still contagious. As a result, Premier advises that all members, both acute and non-acute, follow recommended guidance for limiting the potential for COVID-19 spreading, including limiting points of entry to a facility, providing added signage about proper hand hygiene, and ensuring safe triage and isolation. As a reminder, screening and triaging of patients outside of the emergency department is allowed during surge demand and pandemics. Therefore, facilities can begin screening and triaging patients prior to entering the emergency room.