

December 16, 2020

Matt Scola, PharmD, M.H.A.  
Supply Chain Logistics Operation Cell  
Logistics Response Assistance Team  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Dr. Scola:

On behalf of the American Dental Association's (ADA) more than 163,000 dentist members, we have grave concerns regarding the cost, availability, and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Dentistry is an essential health care service and dentists and their teams are essential health care workers who need access to PPE in order to stay safe from the Coronavirus. The ADA's Health Policy Institute (HPI) has been collecting and tracking PPE data on dental practices since the onset of the pandemic. PPE categories tracked include N95/KN95 masks, surgical masks, face shields, gowns, disinfecting supplies, and gloves.

Prices for PPE are up significantly. On average, across all categories of PPE, nearly one-third of dentists reported that prices have at least tripled since the onset of the pandemic. Surgical masks and gloves have seen the largest price increases. Four and five-fold price increases are not uncommon.

Benco, the largest privately owned distributor of dental supplies, provided the ADA with additional pricing data. They informed us that PPE pricing has been steadily increasing for gloves, up an average of 91% per product and increasing monthly. Masks and other PPE currently remain flat; however significant increases occurred within the preceding months. For example, mask costs increased by an average of 57% per product since the pandemic began but only 3% since the end of July. Other average price increases include face shields by 5%, gowns by 8%, and disinfectant supplies by 2%.

Patterson, another major dental supply distributor, indicated that global demand for PPE is at a level never experienced before. The limited number of manufacturers, raw material requirements, global logistic challenges, and import/export issues are the major factors impacting price in the marketplace. Mirroring Benco's findings, Patterson points out that manufacturer's prices have increased since the start of the pandemic. Initially prices went up significantly but more recently prices have stabilized, while still remaining above pre-pandemic levels. Glove availability has been a particular challenge for Patterson. As such, they continue to have order restrictions on gloves. To meet demand, they have had to obtain additional gloves from new suppliers and/or brokers. Adding to the limited supply issue is

the fact that gloves are primarily manufactured in one part of the world with fixed manufacturing capacity, challenged raw material requirements, and strict government regulations.

As can be imagined, PPE demand is increasing while supply is becoming limited. With larger distributors unable to fill the demand, dentists are relying on a larger number of distributors for PPE. This includes Amazon and smaller distributors. For example prior to the pandemic, 9% of dental practices utilized Amazon for PPE; whereas since the onset, Amazon has been utilized by 32% of practices. And prior to the pandemic, half of the dentists relied on a single PPE distributor; whereas now, nearly three-quarters of dentists are using at least two different distributors. Relative to gloves, many third party “brokers” have become involved in the distribution process. This is causing price increases for mainstream distributors and ultimately to the end customer. Price gouging is also occurring and unregulated, unsafe products are on the market.

HPI’s recent survey also indicated dentists are finding it moderately to very difficult to purchase gloves in their preferred sizes and material. Due to allergy concerns as well as strength, comfort, and sensitivity preferences, surgical gloves are made with different materials. These include latex, nitrile, neoprene, polyisoprene, and vinyl.

As HHS, FEMA, and other partners work to ensure limited supplies of critical PPE are available to essential health care workers, the ADA wants to ensure that dental practices are supplied with these important health care products for the safety of our patients and our dental teams. The data presented in this letter and in the attached slides highlight our concerns over PPE availability and cost. The ADA wants to partner with HHS to maintain timely PPE supply distribution while reducing costs.

We look forward to continuing to work with HHS on this issue and would welcome the opportunity to meet with your team to further discuss it. Please contact Ms. Roxanne Yaghoubi at 202-415-0187 or [yaghoubir@ada.org](mailto:yaghoubir@ada.org) to facilitate further discussions.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Klemmedson, D.D.S., M.D.  
President

Kathleen T. O’Loughlin, D.M.D., M.P.H.  
Executive Director

DJK:KTO:rm