



April 30, 2020

Key COVID-19 Policies Needed Prior to Reopening America

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & COMMERCE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to identify key legislative policies within the jurisdiction of the Energy and Commerce Committee that are necessary to reopen our country. President Trump recently called on states to relax their social distancing measures but offered no details about how exactly the federal government will ensure the country is ready to reopen without risking new outbreaks.

In a country whose economy and communities are as interconnected as ours, it's irresponsible to leave each state to fend for itself in developing state-based strategies for testing and COVID-19 mitigation. The Administration must take comprehensive action to ensure states and localities have what they need to track, trace, test, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 nationwide.

The Trump Administration's inadequate COVID-19 response efforts have forced states and health systems to compete for personal protective equipment (PPE), tests, and testing supplies. States and health systems have also struggled to get answers from the Administration about how and from where they can get assistance.

While we know that we may be months away from a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved treatment and vaccine, the Administration's failed response on PPE and testing makes clear that we need better preparation from the Administration now. We need to know what exactly they are doing now to ensure that when a promising treatment or vaccine is discovered that our manufacturing capacity and supply chain are prepared to quickly distribute items, such as syringes or alcohol swabs, into our health system and to patients nationwide.

It is clear that Congress must put in place a clear, national strategy to focus our efforts to reopen the economy in a way that will optimize public health and hold this Administration accountable. As President Trump increasingly calls for states to reopen, Congress must enact the following policies before social distancing guidelines can be relaxed:

NATIONAL TESTING PLAN

Develop a public comprehensive testing plan

Health experts agree that expanded testing is critical for fighting COVID-19 and reopening communities, but testing capacity across the country remains woefully inadequate. The Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act provided \$25 billion for the country to expand current testing

capacity, and specifically provided \$11 billion to help States increase testing. However, because of Republican opposition, the legislation failed to require the Administration to identify metrics that would allow Congress to track and monitor their progress in meeting the goals necessary to reopen. Further, the Administration's Testing Blueprint places the burden on states to organize and enhance their testing responses.

This is why it is critical that the Administration should be required to develop a public comprehensive testing plan. The plan must include a clear federal strategy, benchmarks, and timelines for the types and levels of testing necessary, including predicted number of tests and frequency of testing needed to monitor and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. It should also include specific benchmarks and timelines for sufficient availability of all testing materials and supplies and how such materials shall be allocated. In addition, the strategy should identify how tests will be validated and how the Administration will ensure sufficient laboratory and personnel capacity to meet testing needs. Finally, the plan should offer specific guidelines to ensure adequate testing in rural and other underserved communities.

Establish a centralized testing information website

Despite President Trump's insistence that anyone can get a test if they want it, COVID-19 diagnostic testing is largely out of reach for most Americans. To provide greater transparency around available diagnostic tests and testing capacity, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) should be required to establish a public, searchable website. The site would identify all COVID-19 diagnostic tests available in the United States and provide relevant information about each test, such as the timeline for results, sensitivity and specificity, and the number of labs running that specific test. States should also be required to establish and maintain a listing on their official website of all testing locations and contact information for the locations.

Provide for Public Reporting on COVID-19 Testing Results

Currently, not all testing sites are required to report on the number of tests performed or the results of such tests. In order to provide greater information around our testing capacity, laboratories performing or analyzing tests related to COVID-19 should be required to report this information regularly to HHS.

ADEQUATE SUPPLY CHAIN

Appoint a Senior Administration Official as Medical Supplies Response Coordinator on the President's Coronavirus Task Force

States, cities, hospitals, and health care workers continue to pay the price for the Trump Administration's failure to centralize supply chain decision making and communications. A Medical Supplies Response Coordinator would serve as the point of contact for the health care system, supply chain officials, and states on PPE, medical supplies, medical equipment, and, as they are developed and come to the market, vaccines and treatments. The appointee should be required to have health care training and an

understanding of medical supply chain logistics.

Create a medical supplies and capacity reporting portal

Transparency of product usage and capacity availability is an important part of ensuring all health care entities have what they need to respond to COVID-19. This portal should enable hospitals and long-term care facilities to report their inventory related to PPE, medical supplies (like available ventilators and beds), and facility capacity (like number of needed doctors, nurses, and lab personnel). Facilities should be required to report these figures on a biweekly basis.

COORDINATED CONTACT TRACING AND SURVEILLANCE

Health and medical experts agree that in order to safely reopen the United States, a nationwide effort must first be mounted to ensure the eradication of COVID-19. Congress should develop a national program to track, identify, and isolate all possible traces of this disease. If we attempt to reopen this country without a sweeping approach that matches the magnitude of the crisis, more Americans will unnecessarily die.

Congressional action should:

- Provide federal funding to states, localities, territories, and tribes to carry out surveillance, containment, and mitigation activities for COVID-19. These activities should include contact tracing and surveillance, as well as voluntary isolation and quarantine of infected and exposed individuals. HHS should work with state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments to hire locally to supplement the public health workforce's ability to trace contacts.
- Direct HHS to develop guidance on community-based voluntary isolation and quarantine activities.
- Support research and development of efficient and effective strategies related to contact tracing and surveillance for COVID-19.
- Require a report to Congress on implementation of the program and the effectiveness of such initiative.

PREPARING FOR TREATMENTS OR VACCINES

Planning is needed now to ensure that when an approved treatment or vaccine is available that it can be swiftly distributed across the country. The Administration should be required to prepare a strategy and report to Congress on what actions are being done to ready the supply chain for a future treatment or vaccine. The plan should include an assessment of current manufacturing capability, any additional actions needed to bolster manufacturing capacity, including whether the Administration will enter into contracts or partnerships to reach needed manufacturing levels, and estimates of what additional materials

are needed for the administration of treatments or vaccines. It should also include the steps that will be taken to ensure access to these materials.

FREE COVERAGE FOR ALL AMERICANS

COVID-19 affects people from all walks of life, all income levels, and all ages. Guaranteeing that all Americans can access and afford COVID-19 related care is critical to stemming the spread of this outbreak. To do so, we must implement policies to address the approximately 27 million uninsured who may face significant barriers to accessing affordable testing and treatment. These individuals should be able to access services without fear that doing so will affect their immigration status or jeopardize their family. Furthermore, providers should be fairly and equitably reimbursed for the COVID-19 services they provide to uninsured individuals.

For those who are insured, either through private health plans or public programs like Medicare and Medicaid, we must also guarantee that COVID-19 testing and treatment is accessible and free. This includes requiring that testing and any preventative treatment or vaccine that is developed is covered at no cost to the consumer. Cost must not be a barrier to testing and treatment and individuals should not be saddled with medical debt after receiving COVID-19 related services.

ROBUST INVESTMENTS IN DATA COLLECTION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Invest in the expansion and improvement of public health data collection, transmission, and exchange

Important data systems used by state, local, tribal, and territorial public health departments are outdated and insufficient. These data systems have been underfunded and left to stagnate over the past decade. Congress should provide sufficient resources for public health departments to modernize their technology so they can mount a twenty-first century response to COVID-19.

Modernize the collection of demographic public health data to inform our response and understand the impacts of COVID-19 on communities of color

Based on data currently available, individuals from racial and ethnic communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These data are alarming and demonstrate in real time the persistent racial disparities in our health care system. More must be done to understand these inequities.

The Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act requires HHS to issue reports on COVID-19 testing, the number and rates of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths as a result of COVID-19, as well as an epidemiological analysis of such data. While these reports are a positive step forward, we must ensure that CDC is regularly receiving standardized demographic data related to COVID-19 from all entities. This will help us better understand the incidence, prevalence, and impact of COVID-19 on various populations so we can then put measures in place now to address any disparities.

Therefore, HHS must work to modernize public health data collection methods to help facilitate national collection of standardized demographic data and work with states to help implement standards for such collection. CDC should also conduct field studies to better understand health inequities related to COVID-19, including an analysis of whether socioeconomic or disability status, or other factors are contributing to COVID-19 outcomes. Finally, relying on the data and analysis collected under the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act, HHS should propose evidence-based response strategies to reduce disparities identified as being related to COVID-19.

Authorize significant resources to support state public health labs

Our state labs are on the frontlines of fighting infectious diseases, but never before have we needed to call on them to respond to a pandemic of this magnitude. Congress should authorize funding to support improvement, renovation, or modernization of lab infrastructure at our public health labs.

Propose significant resources to improve core public health infrastructure at CDC and at state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments

Due to chronic underfunding, our public health departments are lacking core infrastructure necessary to adequately respond to this crisis. Our public health departments need expanded workforce, laboratory systems, health information systems, contact tracing capacity and surveillance to account for the unprecedented spread of COVID-19.