

## Report in Brief

Date: October 2023

Report No. A-04-20-02028

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES  
**OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**



### Why OIG Did This Audit

HHS is the U.S. Government's principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans. Included in its role of protecting the health of Americans is the responsibility to respond to pandemics. The Strategic National Stockpile is part of HHS's Federal medical response infrastructure. Before COVID-19, the most recent pandemic occurred in 2009 and was caused by the H1N1 influenza virus. When COVID-19 first reached the United States in January 2020, some public health officials criticized Stockpile management for failing to act with urgency when responding to State requests for personal protective equipment (PPE).

Our objective was to determine whether the Stockpile, under the direction of the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), was effective in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### How OIG Did This Audit

We interviewed officials from ASPR, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Stockpile, the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, and the U.S. Marshals Service and assessed available documentation during our audit period, which covered January through June 2020.

## The Strategic National Stockpile Was Not Positioned To Respond Effectively to the COVID-19 Pandemic

### What OIG Found

The Stockpile was operationally effective in distributing its limited inventory in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, based on established policies and procedures and consistent with its statutory obligations. However, the Stockpile's strategic effectiveness and its ability to meet COVID-19 demands were impacted by external and internal factors outside of its control.

Despite the challenges it faced, the Stockpile used established processes to distribute its limited supply of PPE and other items during the first 3 months of 2020. However, because of external and internal factors beyond its control, the Stockpile could not meet demand and was not equipped to handle the COVID-19 pandemic.

### What OIG Recommends and ASPR Comments

We made several recommendations, including that ASPR: (1) mitigate the risk presented by relying on foreign supply chains and just-in-time inventory strategies when determining annual Stockpile purchases; (2) develop a strategic plan for the Stockpile that clearly defines the goals and objectives of the Stockpile and the Stockpile's roles and responsibilities for responding to emergency events, including pandemics; and (3) work to increase the Stockpile's annual funding to keep pace with the Stockpile's increased responsibilities. The full recommendations are in the report.

In response to our draft report, ASPR concurred with our first and third recommendation. ASPR neither concurred nor non-concurred with our second, fourth, fifth, and sixth recommendation. For these recommendations ASPR instead discussed actions it has taken or plans to take to implement our recommendations. ASPR stated that it established the Office of the Industrial Base Management and Supply Chain to address the risk of relying on foreign supply chains and just-in-time inventory strategies. ASPR also stated that the Stockpile continues efforts to clarify capabilities for State, local, territorial, and Tribal partners and develop and share resources with them. ASPR continues efforts to fully integrate the Stockpile into ASPR, while relaunching the Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures Enterprise and continuing to work with Congress to advocate for additional funding. We commend ASPR on the actions it has taken or is taking to address our recommendations.