

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Office of Public Affairs

Weekly Update: DHS Response to COVID-19

WASHINGTON – As the Nation transitions from a period of crisis to economic recovery, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will continue to leverage every social, medical, logistical and security tool at its disposal to defend the homeland from COVID-19. Thanks to a wide range of strategic initiatives, the Department and its components have achieved dozens of key deliverables last week through its unprecedented, whole-of-America response, which in return is slowing the virus’s spread and saving millions of lives. These results could not have been secured by the Department without its dedicated workforce, who have adapted and persevered to meet these extraordinary challenges despite their own personal hardships.

“The men and women of the Transportation Security Administration continue to go above and beyond to protect the health and safety of travelers, while ensuring the security of our critical transportation systems during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said TSA Administrator David Pekoske. “Every day, our dedicated employees are performing vital tasks to keep our transportation systems moving for those with essential travel, and working with industry partners to ensure confidence across systems as we recover and travel levels increase.”

Below is a list of some of DHS’s efforts against COVID-19 last week:

Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD)

Enhanced Screenings at Airports. CWMD contract personnel are continuing to support the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with enhanced screenings for travelers through 13 specially designated airports. As of April 26th, CWMD has processed approximately 279,319 travelers for enhanced screening, including 1,506 who were referred to CDC for further medical evaluation.

CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION (CBP)

Securing the Border from Infectious Diseases. CBP announced on April 20th that it will extend its restrictions on non-essential travel across our shared borders with Canada and Mexico until May 21st. As President Trump has stated previously, border control, travel restrictions, and other limitations remain critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19 and allowing for the phased opening of the country.

Building the Wall and Deterring Illegal Immigration. On April 22nd, CBP launched a border wall system [webpage](#) that features a construction video and an interactive map. This website not only gives American taxpayers a first-hand look at the ongoing border wall construction, but it also serves as a strong visual deterrent to those in coronavirus-impacted countries who are contemplating making the dangerous and deadly journey to the U.S. across the Southern border.

Seizing Counterfeit Goods from Foreign Sources. On April 23rd, CBP officials seized 2,000 counterfeit respirators that were shipped to the U.S. from China. Ensuring the integrity of imported goods, including personal protection equipment (PPE), is a vital function that CBP performs every day to protect the American public during the pandemic.

Supporting the Safe Return of U.S. Citizens Stranded Overseas. As of April 26th, CBP, in close coordination with the State Department's Repatriation Task Force, has facilitated the return of more than 69,000 Americans back to the U.S. from 128 countries. This interagency operation is vital to reuniting families and keeping Americans out of harm's way.

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)

Promoting Integrity and Security in Upcoming Elections. CISA continues to coordinate with government and industry partners to ensure upcoming elections are accessible and secure for voters. On April 22nd, CISA's COVID-19 Elections Working Group, which is comprised of state, local, and private sector partners, [released](#) two new products focused on voter outreach, education, and best practices to ensure that every ballot is delivered properly to voter residences.

Ensuring that Operation Centers and Control Rooms Remain Viable. On April 23rd, CISA [released](#) the Critical Infrastructure Operations Centers and Control Rooms Guide for Pandemic Response, which is geared towards all 16 critical infrastructure sectors identified by the federal government. The guide provides considerations and mitigation measures for operation centers and control rooms, but can be applied further to any critical node that is required to continue functioning in a pandemic environment.

Keeping the Healthcare Industry Safe and Secure. CISA, Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) jointly released a [bulletin](#) on April 24th regarding potential threats to the healthcare industry and resources on how to mitigate these threats.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Accelerating Antibody Research Efforts. On April 20th, FEMA's Medical Countermeasures Task Force reported that it established six agreements with healthcare providers to obtain convalescent plasma from COVID-19 survivors in support of the CDC's Serology Project Team's research efforts. Convalescent plasma, which is the liquid part of blood that possibly contains viral antibodies, is being investigated by medical researchers as a potential treatment for COVID-19.

Bolstering Testing Capacity at Food Processing Centers. On April 20th, FEMA's Laboratory Diagnostics Task Force coordinated with the Region VII office to deliver 7,000 test kits to Kansas where the region's largest meat processing facilities are experiencing clusters of COVID-19 infections. These diagnostic supplies will help identify infections more rapidly while preventing its transmission throughout the state's critical agriculture infrastructure, which processes a significant portion of the nation's meat supply.

Addressing Medical Supply Needs in Non-Healthcare Settings. On April 22nd, FEMA published [guidance](#) to address how organizations in non-healthcare settings should consider and manage

their personal protective equipment (PPE) needs while ensuring the protection of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes how to preserve limited supplies of PPE, how to consider needs during periods of shortages, and how to acquire and request PPE (i.e., in the face of critical shortages and whereas normal supply chain allocation cannot meet operational requirements).

Deploying Federal Funds in Support of State Response Efforts. Federal funds are being deployed to help ensure that health care providers have the critical resources they need to provide rapid care and treatment to COVID-19 patients in hard-hit areas across the U.S. Since April 20th, FEMA has obligated around \$400 million to support state response efforts, bringing the total amount to \$6.1 billion thus far. This includes an additional \$100 million in funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program to help first responders access PPE and other critical medical supplies during the outbreak.

Increasing Availability of Critical Resources. As a part of the Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force, FEMA is executing a whole-of-nation approach to address the limited supply of critical and life-saving equipment. As of April 25th, FEMA has coordinated the delivery of the following to critical locations: 70.7 million N95 respirators, 104.5 million surgical masks, 7 million face shields, 14.7 million surgical gowns, 793.8 million gloves, and 10,603 ventilators. FEMA's Health Care Resilience Task Force is also working with private manufacturers to address dialysis fluid shortages in New York City, which is critical for COVID-19 patients in ICU's who are experiencing kidney failure.

Coordinating Air Flights to Address Medical Supply Shortages. FEMA continues to expedite the movement of critical supplies, including masks, respirators, gloves, goggles, and surgical gowns, from the global market to medical distributors in various locations across the U.S. This historic partnership with the private sector is named Project Air-Bridge. Between April 20th and April 26th, 21 international flights arrived in the U.S. with critical medical supplies, bringing the total to 85 with an additional 26 scheduled or in transit. These flights deliver PPE to areas of greatest need through prioritized distributor supply chains nine times faster than movement by sea.

FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING CENTERS (FLETC)

Implementing Protocols to Protect Returning Students. Although FLETC has temporarily paused in-person operations, the agency is engaged in detailed planning efforts to resume law enforcement training in the COVID-environment. Over the past week, FLETC piloted new screening procedures whereby security contractors are conducting temperature checks and asking COVID-related screening questions of all people attempting to enter FLETC's facilities. It has also begun to clean and disinfect all venues in preparation for students' return.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT (ICE)

Cracking Down on Fraud and Criminal Activity. On April 20th, ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) unit, with assistance from CBP's Field Intelligence Group, seized approximately 5,300 potentially fraudulent COVID-19 test kits. This seizure is a part of an interagency enforcement campaign known as Operation Stolen Promise, which was launched

by ICE on April 15th to combat COVID-19-related fraud and other criminal activity. To date, ICE has opened more than 190 investigations nationwide.

INTELLIGENCE & ANALYSIS (I&A)

Educating the Public About Cyber-Related Threats. On April 24th, I&A and CISA partnered with the American Hospital Association to [launch a podcast mini-series](#) addressing cyber threats that put the U.S. health system at risk. It offers best practices to security experts and health care administrators who are responsible for the infrastructure supporting medical providers during the COVID-19 response.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (S&T)

Arming the Nation with Scientific Research. On April 23rd, William Bryan, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary for Science and Technology (S&T), provided an update on key research findings from S&T's National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center (NBACC) at the White House Coronavirus Task Force briefing. His update covered emerging results and trends from studies conducted at NBACC including the effects of sunlight and humidity on the virus as well as findings on common disinfectants that can kill the virus.

Driving Evidence-Based Policymaking. On April 24th, S&T updated its [Master Question List](#) (MQL), a compilation of available research on operationally-relevant questions to aid decision makers in the COVID-19 response. The MQL is a quick-reference guide covering what is known about the virus, what additional information is needed, and who may be working to address these fundamental questions. New entries include references to how much agent will make a healthy individual ill, how the virus spreads from one host to another, and what treatments are effective.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (TSA)

Keeping Americans Safe While Ensuring Continuity of U.S. Travel. TSA continues to follow CDC guidance to protect its workers and the nation's transportation system, while ensuring the freedom of movement for people and commerce will not be impeded during the pandemic. Between April 20th and April 26th, TSA screened nearly 640,721 travelers who have all reached their destinations safely.

U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS)

Target Date to Reopen Offices. On April 24th, USCIS [announced](#) that offices temporarily suspended will begin to reopen on June 4th unless the public closures are extended further to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Employees in these offices are continuing to perform mission-essential services that do not require face-to-face contact with the public while the offices are closed.

United States Coast Guard (USCG)

Monitoring Vessels that Pose a Risk to Public Health. The Coast Guard is working non-stop to protect the health and safety of the American public while keeping U.S. supply chains open and viable. Between April 20th and April 26th, USCG tracked 110 commercial vessels that departed from a coronavirus-impacted country and was scheduled to arrive at a U.S. port. In accordance

with the Coast Guard's latest [Maritime Safety Information Bulletin](#) (MSIB), which was updated on April 24th, all vessels destined for a U.S. port are required to report to the CDC any sick or deceased crew/passengers prior to arrival at a U.S. port or they will be denied entry into U.S. territorial waters.

Facilitating the Offload of Cruise Ships. Between April 20th and April 26th, the Coast Guard facilitated the offload of 119 passengers aboard the Pacific Princess cruise ship in Los Angeles and 103 crew members aboard the Grand Princess cruise ship in San Francisco. The passengers and crew were allowed to disembark from the ships after the Coast Guard determined they were not infected with COVID-19 or other infectious diseases. To date, the Coast Guard has facilitated the discharge of over 265,000 passengers from over 125 cruise ships.

United States Secret Service (USSS)

Protecting Americans From Financial Scams. On April 20th, the Secret Service partnered with the U.S. Treasury to launch the "[Know Your U.S. Treasury Check](#)" campaign – an initiative to bring awareness to citizens, retailers, and financial institutions on how to protect themselves from scams associated with U.S. Treasury checks funded by the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

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