



Edinburgh

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2021;373:n1563
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1563>
Published: 17 June 2021

Covid-19: Scottish government failed to act on pre-pandemic advice to bolster PPE supplies, report finds

Bryan Christie

The Scottish government did not heed warnings before the pandemic that improvements were needed to the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), and it was not best prepared to respond to covid-19, Audit Scotland has reported.

The report called for better long term planning to secure supplies and ensure effective distribution of PPE to frontline services in any future emergency. It recognised that the challenges posed by covid-19 were “significant and unprecedented” and that the global market for PPE early in the pandemic had been complex and volatile.¹

The 44 million items of PPE stored in Scotland at the start of the pandemic were inadequate to meet demand in health and social care, and emergency procurement procedures had to be used to buy more supplies. From March 2020 to June this year, 78 contracts worth £340m (€398m; \$475m) were awarded to companies providing PPE. Of these, 29 contracts worth £98m went to new suppliers without competition. A total of 1.1 billion items of PPE were distributed in Scotland from March 2020 to April 2021.

Worldwide demand pushed up prices for PPE, costing the Scottish health service £37m more than if prices had remained at 2019 levels.

The report said that the need to improve PPE supplies had been identified in pandemic planning exercises in 2015 and 2018 but that the Scottish government had failed to implement the recommendations. It concluded that Scotland could have been better prepared and could have done more to ensure access to PPE and training in its use for frontline staff.

A survey carried out by the BMA among doctors in Scotland in April 2020 found that as many as 29% reported shortages of certain PPE items. Similar findings were reported in surveys by the Royal College of Nursing.

Stephen Boyle, auditor general for Scotland, said that the Scottish government and the NHS worked well together under extremely challenging circumstances to set up new arrangements for the supply and distribution of PPE. He said, “The challenge now will be in developing a longer term approach to PPE supply and distribution that includes business as usual needs as well as preparing for future pandemics.”

¹ Audit Scotland. Covid-19: Personal protective equipment. 17 Jun 2021. <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment>.

This article is made freely available for use in accordance with BMJ's website terms and conditions for the duration of the covid-19 pandemic or until otherwise determined by BMJ. You may use, download and print the article for any lawful, non-commercial purpose (including text and data mining) provided that all copyright notices and trade marks are retained.