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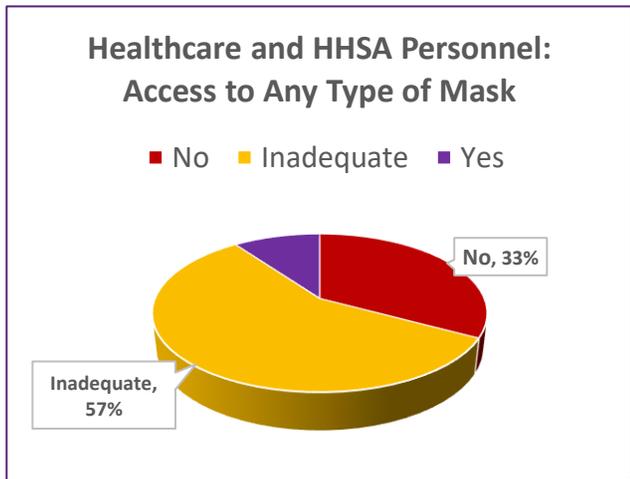
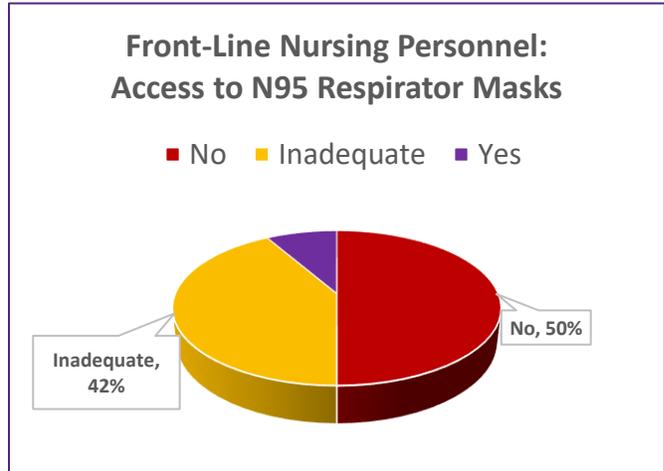
SAN DIEGO COUNTY NURSES & HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL IN THE BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19

SUMMARY:

The results of a survey of front-line Healthcare personnel and Human Services staff conducted from March 25, 2020 to April 4, 2020 found that the County of San Diego is failing to consistently provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other resources necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19.ⁱ

50% of nursing staff surveyed report no access to N95 respirator masks, despite CalOSHA's requirement that employers provide them.ⁱⁱ Another 42% of nurses report inadequate N95 supplies, forcing them to unsafely reuse masks.

Overall, 90% of front-line Health and Human Services staff surveyed report either no access or limited access to masks (N95s, facemasks, or surgical masks). Gloves, protective clothing, sanitizer, and wipes are also unavailable or in short supply.



BACKGROUND:

The County of San Diego's response to COVID-19 effectively started in early March as State and Federal public health agencies warned of the seriousness of the pandemic. Even as the County took some measures to limit public exposure, such as restricting public gatherings, nurses and other front-line staff reported to SEIU Local 221 that the County was failing to provide the PPE they need.

These reports indicate that the County is failing to follow CalOSHA's mandatory Aerosol Transmissible Disease (ATD) standard, which requires employers in healthcare settings to provide respiratory

protection to employees.ⁱⁱⁱ The ATD standard exists not only to protect employees, but also patients and the public from infectious diseases healthcare personnel are exposed to in the course of their jobs.

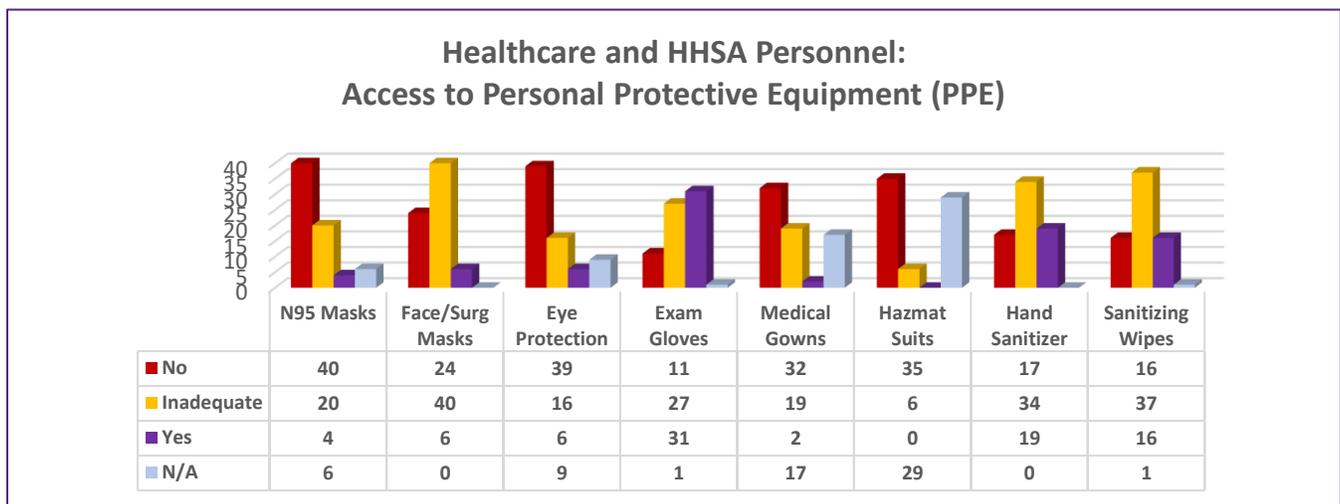
SEIU Local 221 undertook this survey, in part to determine how widespread violations of the ATD standard are, before pursuing enforcement actions against the County. This data is also being used to collaboratively assist the County in directing resources to areas of greatest need, although recent history indicates these efforts are not likely to produce full compliance.

The County of San Diego has one of the largest documented reserve funds of local governments in the country, with over \$2 billion in reserves.^{iv} The County's record of underinvestment in public health contributed to the Hepatitis A outbreak in 2016-2017, which killed 20 people. A State audit^v and a County Grand Jury report^{vi} included several recommendations for the County to be better prepared to handle a public health crisis.

DATA AND FINDINGS:

A review of survey data submitted online by 70 front-line staff from March 25, 2020 to April 4, 2020 reveals widespread failure by the County of San Diego to provide adequate PPE. Nursing personnel (including RNs and LVNs) in Public Health and County Jails make up 51% of the survey respondents. Significant majorities of nurses report that they either do not have access to or have inadequate supplies of N95s, facemasks/surgical masks, eye protection, protective clothing, hand sanitizer, and wipes. Of the nursing personnel surveyed, 81% stated that their work involves directly treating or preventing COVID-19 cases.

The other 49% of employees surveyed include healthcare personnel such as Pharmacists, Doctors, and Mental Health Clinicians, as well as front-line Human Services personnel like Social Workers and Residential Care Workers (RCWs) who serve medically sensitive clients. Like their colleagues in nursing, a majority of these front-line staff report that many types of necessary PPE are unavailable or in short supply, including hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes that all employees need routine access to.



This data also points to “hot spots” where front-line staff are most poorly equipped, including County Jails operated by the Sheriff, the County Psychiatric Hospital, and Polinsky Children’s Center. Each of these facilities have recently reported cases of COVID-19, including cases affecting RNs and RCWs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Thus far the County of San Diego has failed to take the necessary steps to protect front-line staff and maintain our public health response capacity. Without decisive action on these points this virus will take an even more devastating toll. Front-line staff recommend the following:

1. Comply with the Aerosol Transmissible Disease (ATD) standard and provide N95 respirator masks (or better) to all ATD covered employees upon request.
2. Provide adequate PPE to all personnel required to work during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Use all available resources, including County reserves, to obtain additional N95s and other PPE.
4. Provide hazard pay to all personnel required to work during the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Lobby the State and Federal governments to use their emergency powers to direct the private sector to produce additional N95 respirators and other PPE needed for essential front-line staff.

ⁱ <http://www.seiu221.org/2020/03/25/county-healthcare-worker-safety-survey/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5199.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/ATD-Guide.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.voiceofsandiego.org/topics/government/truth-behind-claims-vast-piles-county-cash/>

^v <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2018-116.pdf>

^{vi} <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/grandjury/reports/2017-2018/HepAReport.pdf>