

METRO EXCLUSIVE

City Hall didn't secure 1st order of COVID-19 supplies for NYC until March 6

By Julia Marsh

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Bill de Blasio
William Farrington

Mayor Bill de Blasio has **blamed President Trump** for the city's severe shortage of COVID-19 supplies even though City Hall didn't secure its first order for emergency protective gear until March 6, The Post has learned.

Officials with the city's Office of Emergency Management tried to purchase nearly 200,000 n95 masks on Feb. 7, but weeks later they learned the vendors had already run out.

It was not until March 6 and March 10 — over two months after the coronavirus **outbreak first hit China** — that they finally secured the first emergency procurements of masks and hand sanitizer, according to the city comptroller's office.

"Our city is the epicenter of this outbreak in the United States, and we are lacking supplies because the mayor didn't notice until two weeks ago?" fumed City Councilman Chaim Deutsch.

"We ought to have been prepared for this. Blaming Trump is an easy way to avoid hard questions, but it exposes a distinct lack of management on the part of this administration," the Brooklyn Democrat said.

A City Hall spokeswoman said on Feb. 7, the city's Office of Emergency Management tried to purchase nearly 200,000 N95 masks, but regular vendors had already run out. She added that the Health Department had already stockpiled 19 million surgical masks and said there have been no payment delays.

Comptroller Scott Stringer granted approval for the early March orders of masks and hand sanitizer the same day, but a medical supply vendor who has standing city contracts told The Post that initial requests for protective gear from the Department of Citywide Administrative Services were mired in bureaucratic red tape.

It took the agency an average of 72 hours to complete an order, he said.

"We'd send them a list of products we can deliver within 24, 48 hours," said the head of one of the medical supply companies, who declined to be named for fear of jeopardizing his current contracts.

"The private sector is knocking on our door all day, every day. We have every hospital facility from Buffalo to across the country chasing us for the same product — N95 masks, surgical masks, gloves, hand sanitizer — and the city just moves so slow, I mean it's a joke," he said.

His company started stocking up on supplies in January and he works with a Chinese manufacturer that's operating at 100 percent capacity.

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He said the city missed out on eight of 10 supply orders because DCAS blew payment deadlines.

"I personally live in the city. It's just a shame to see the city move at the pace they're moving. It's just an embarrassment," the supplier said.

"For the private sector, we've been selling and pushing product in the last four weeks and the city woke up two weeks ago," the exec said.

A city spokeswoman said there were no payment delays.

De Blasio actually tries to blame New York's coronavirus troubles on Trump

The comptroller's office approved 12 emergency contracts totaling \$150 million before the mayor suspended procurement rules on March 16 and took over the process.

During his City Hall press briefing Thursday, de Blasio assured NYPD and other first responders, who've [complained about a lack of protective equipment](#), that he's tried everything in his power to marshal supplies.

"We will do everything we can to get every conceivable supply of protective equipment from anywhere in the nation that we can on the private market and get it directly to you," he said.

But, he added, Trump "has to give the order to get the federal government to get you what you deserve."

Nick Benson, a DCAS spokesman, said the city maintains a three-month supply of gloves, cleaning products and hand sanitizer.

[Face masks used during the coronavirus outbreak.](#)

Face masks used during the coronavirus outbreak

Getty Images

Since the outbreak, the city has ordered 25 million masks, 2 million bottles of sanitizer, 12,000 thermometers and 2,000 ventilators. Turnaround times "vary significantly," Benson said.

"There is enormous demand for these and other products, but the City of New York is leveraging existing contracts with vendors to obtain supplies. When a vendor is unable to provide the quantity we need, we have identified other vendors. In many cases, vendors are shipping goods as soon as they're manufactured," Benson added.

On Thursday, de Blasio said [if the federal government doesn't send](#) 3 million more N95 masks, 50 million more surgical masks, 15,000 ventilators and 45 million surgical gowns, coveralls, gloves and face shields by April, the city could run out of these supplies.

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