

# U.S. Rep. Pocan: Presses Sec. Esper on DoD COVID-19 strategy

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**WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Representative Mark Pocan (WI-02)** today sent a letter to Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, to follow-up on previous outreach to the Department of Defense (DoD) on the lack of coronavirus testing capabilities available to military personnel stationed abroad as well as seeking additional information about the DoD's response strategies to the coronavirus outbreak.

See the full letter below and [here](#).

March 13, 2020

Dr. Mark T. Esper

Secretary of Defense

United States of America

1000 Defense Pentagon

Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

Global pandemics know no boundaries, neither should responses to them. For that reason, I write to inquire about the Department of Defense's (DOD) preparedness and response planning for novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Domestically, America's response to COVID-19 has been disturbing. The severity of the threat has been underestimated and understated from the beginning; and, as a result, the Administration has proven incapable of developing a coherent strategy to combat the disease.

In times such as this, it is imperative that every American receive the care they need. That is especially true for our servicemembers who will inevitably be called upon to assist in the global response to COVID-19. Unfortunately, however, I have been told that there are members of our military stationed in Afghanistan who have flu-like symptoms, have tested negative for the flu, and are being denied testing for COVID-19. If true, this is deeply distressing and must be remedied immediately. Senior military officials who travel from installation to installation may be unknowingly contributing to the spread of COVID-19 among servicemembers serving in some of the most vulnerable regions of the world.

Therefore, I wish to know the following:

1. Does DOD have COVID-19 tests?
2. If so, how many?
3. How many tests can DOD labs process per day?
4. Can any servicemember who wishes to be tested for COVID-19 receive a test?
5. Has any servicemember who has requested a test for COVID-19 been denied a test for COVID-19?
6. If so, how many?
7. How many COVID-19 tests are available to servicemembers stationed abroad?
8. How many COVID-19 tests are available to servicemembers stationed in Afghanistan?
9. How many servicemembers currently have COVID-19?
10. How many servicemembers have been quarantined because of COVID-19 concerns or exposure?
11. Because sample specimens taken as part of COVID-19 test collections typically

degrade beyond many labs' testing capabilities within 72 hours, how many servicemembers would currently be unable to have a collected sample tested for COVID-19 within 72 hours of collection?

12. What new Defense-wide procedures have you implemented in response to COVID-19?
13. What is the implementation date for each of the procedures listed in response to the previous question?
14. Is DOD concerned about any possible drug shortage during this COVID-19 outbreak?
15. If so, what steps are being taken to address those concerns?
16. What medical supplies and medical care capacity (such as medical care facilities, hospitals, isolation units, intensive care beds, etc.) for servicemembers do you anticipate will be most stressed during this pandemic?
17. Finally, how much additional funding do you anticipate requesting from Congress in order to adequately respond to threats posed by COVID-19?

I appreciate your immediate attention to this matter, and encourage you to publicly announce to all servicemembers, including their families, the COVID-19 procedures you have established and the level of care they can expect to receive. Given the seriousness of this inquiry, I request a response to the questions contained in this letter in no less than 48 hours.

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