

**Statement from the American Society for Microbiology  
in response to the  
House Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Health Hearing:  
“Road to Recovery: Ramping Up COVID-19 Vaccines, Testing, and Medical Supply Chain”**

**February 3, 2021**

New, comprehensive and transparent testing approaches are needed to get the COVID-19 pandemic under control in the weeks and months ahead. The persistent testing challenges the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) and its members have been communicating to policymakers still remain. Left unaddressed, they will continue to hinder our efforts to maximize vaccine distribution, restart the economy, and begin getting back to everyday life.

ASM has been tracking shortages in our member laboratories and can contribute data to inform a more comprehensive strategy. The [Clinical Microbiology Supply Shortage Collection \(CMSSC\)](#) tool provides real time, geographically diverse information demonstrating that many labs lack the supplies necessary to maximize their testing capacity. In addition, the supply chain issues that have plagued COVID-19 testing are affecting other routine microbial tests for a wide range of infectious diseases. For example, recent CMSSC data indicates 47.5% of labs surveyed have a shortage of supplies for detection of routine bacteria (including the bacteria causing strep throat, pneumonia, bronchitis and urinary tract infections).

ASM thanks Chairwoman Anna Eshoo, Ranking Member Brett Guthrie, and members of the House Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Health for holding this hearing to discuss our nation’s continued response to and efforts toward recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate the focus on key areas where we have faced ongoing challenges for months such as testing and supply chain failures. We encourage Congress to provide additional emergency funding in the coming weeks to ensure we can continue to respond and tackle new challenges such as emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants.

In addition to addressing supply shortages, ASM and its members have identified two other urgent priorities:

**Increase Testing Capacity and Access**

While the overall numbers of COVID-19 tests have increased since the beginning of the pandemic, so too has the need, and that will continue to grow. Disparities in testing access must be addressed given the disproportionate burden of COVID-19 borne by segments of our society.

A coordinated plan to test asymptomatic individuals will be a key part of reopening schools and offices, allowing travel, and rescheduling long-delayed medical procedures. As the massive effort to roll out vaccines takes hold, on-going testing for public health surveillance will also be a key element of that effort. For surveillance to be effective in light of new variants that have emerged, the testing capacity must be followed by boosting capacity to obtain samples for sequencing.

The Biden Administration’s efforts to develop a national strategy for testing and or vaccines to respond to COVID-19 addresses a need that is long overdue, and which was highlighted in a [the latest GAO bimonthly report](#). ASM [concurs](#) with the recommendations made in the GAO report, which include a call for a national, comprehensive and publicly-available testing strategy, and a warning about continued critical gaps in the medical supply chain.

**Increase Transparency**

In addition to ramping up production of these critical supplies, the federal government needs to be transparent about the state of testing supply distribution, something that has been lacking since the beginning

of the pandemic. With line of sight to the entire testing ecosystem, we will not be able to effectively manage supplies and ensure that laboratories have certainty for planning purposes.

ASM reiterates our commitment to assisting the Committee, its members, the Congress, and the Biden Administration as the U.S. continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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*The American Society for Microbiology is one of the largest professional societies dedicated to the life sciences and is composed of 30,000 scientists and health practitioners. ASM's mission is to promote and advance the microbial sciences.*

*ASM advances the microbial sciences through conferences, publications, certifications and educational opportunities. It enhances laboratory capacity around the globe through training and resources. It provides a network for scientists in academia, industry and clinical settings. Additionally, ASM promotes a deeper understanding of the microbial sciences to diverse audiences.*