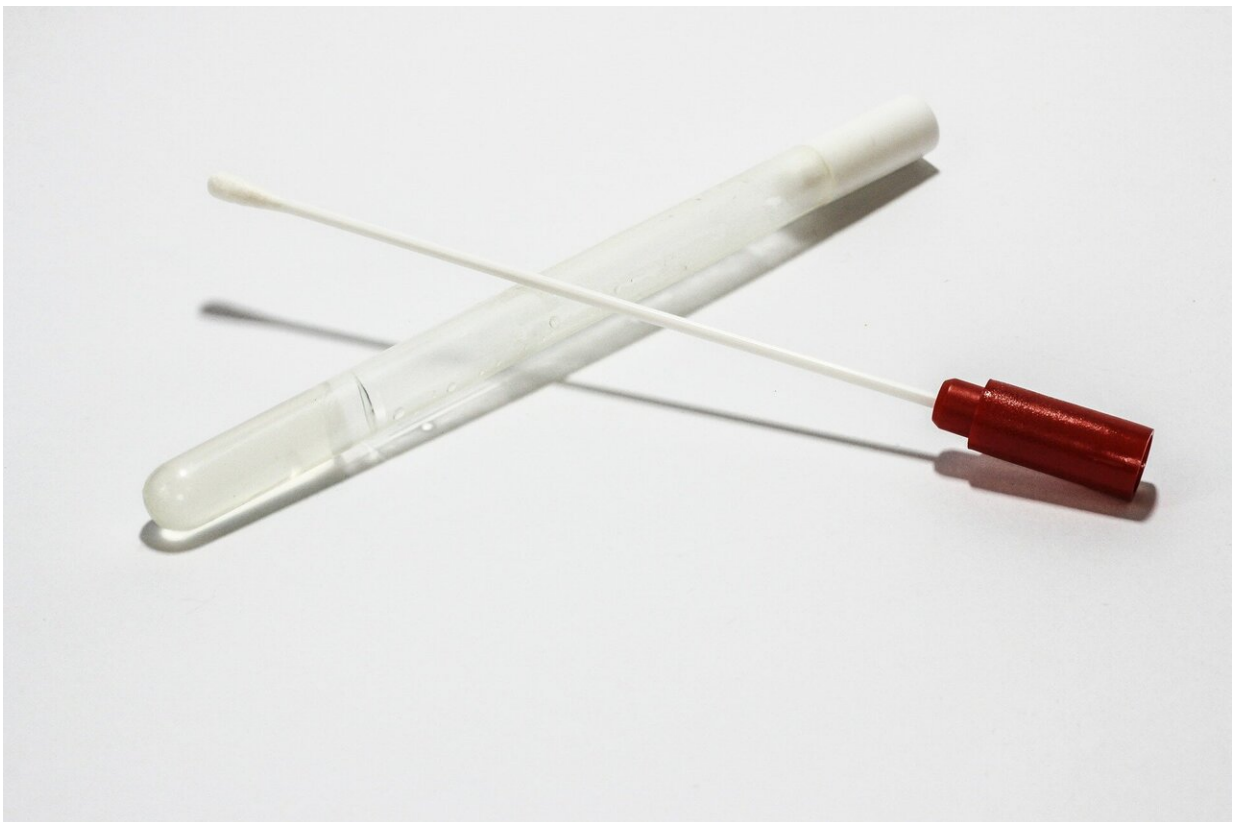


Health experts tell House coronavirus committee that millions more tests per week are needed

May 14 2020, by Ledyard King



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As many as 6 million Americans could be tested for the coronavirus every week by September—and it still might not be enough to allow the

entire country to reopen safely.

A panel of health experts on Wednesday told a congressional panel monitoring the [federal response](#) to the COVID-19 pandemic that the progress being made on ramping up testing remains far short considering that states are beginning to loosen social distancing restrictions enacted over the past two months.

"It was inadequate testing that precipitated the national shutdown. We must not make the same mistake again as we open up our nation," Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute, told the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis. "The U.S. needs more than 900,000 tests every day to safely open up again. We are doing about a third of that."

Jha and other experts urged more transparency at the federal level and better coordination on the strategic deployment of existing tests to gauge a community's vulnerability.

Mark McClellan, who ran the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services under President George W. Bush, said 2 million to 3 million tests were done in the past week.

"That's a significant increase of where we've been," he told the committee.

Based on the administration's expectations about testing increases this month, McClellan said the nation should be on track for 3.5 million a week by the end of the month and "maybe 6 million per week by September."

That still would be about 300,000 tests a week short of what the Harvard Global Health Institute is calling for. And, McLellan said, current testing

could be improved through more strategic distribution of available kits.

Scott Gottlieb, former Food and Drug Administration commissioner under President Donald Trump, said flattening case numbers show an improving situation and technological advances will boost testing capacity in the coming weeks. But he also cautioned about moving too quickly.

"We're seeing signs of a slowing epidemic nationally but we're still going to be reopening against a backdrop of more spread than we anticipated," he told the House committee.

Red states, most of them in the South, have led efforts to reopen their economies, cheered on by Trump, whose administration released a reopening plan that reportedly excluded more restrictive measures than government health experts recommended.

"The question that is being discussed at every kitchen table in America right now (is) how will we know when we are ready to safely reopen our country? To answer that question, we should be informed by history and guided by science," said Committee Chairman James Clyburn, D-S.C. "While we all want to reopen as soon as possible, doing so before the proper safeguards are in place would cause more sickness and death."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi created the panel to monitor the spending of more than \$2 trillion—so far—to combat the crisis and help the U.S. economy battered by a virus that has upended daily life. Republicans opposed the creation of the commission, viewing it as a partisan effort to tarnish the president.

Republicans on the committee spent much of their time questioning the validity of the panel when the House already has eight standing committees to conduct oversight.

"This is crazy," said Indiana GOP Rep. Jackie Walorski, comparing the panel to the efforts by Democrats to impeach Trump last year. "The last thing this coronavirus effort needed was another committee."

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