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## PANDEMIC

# Warning about killer virus was preliminary — FEMA

Thomas Frank, E&E News reporter • Published: Monday, April 13, 2020



A coronavirus testing station in New Jersey last week. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is overseeing the federal response to the pandemic. FEMA/Facebook

A report released last year detailing the devastating consequences of a pandemic was described by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as a "first step" toward increasing the nation's ability to handle millions of hospitalizations and widespread disruption, the agency told E&E News.

The July report, written before the coronavirus surfaced in China, provided a prescient prediction of the COVID-19 pandemic and raised questions about what actions FEMA took in response to its findings.

E&E News disclosed FEMA's findings Thursday. The federal report said that a novel strain of influenza would infect 30% of the U.S. populace and result in "a shortage of medical supplies, equipment, beds, and healthcare workers as hospitals are quickly overwhelmed."

Responding to the story by E&E News, FEMA said its report "was not intended to drive resourcing decisions by itself, but rather to serve as a foundation for a more comprehensive analysis for future decisions."

The agency report "was the first step in that process," FEMA said in an email to E&E News. The agency did not respond to requests for comment before the initial news story was published last week.

The report, named "National Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment," identifies the "greatest threats and hazards" to the United States and actions the nation needs to take to prepare for them. A viral pandemic was one of nine potentially catastrophic threats, along with hurricanes, earthquakes and weather-induced power outages.

FEMA said its next step is to "look at national capability" to deal with a catastrophic event and to "support national targets" for building capacity to deal with the events.

"The point of this document is to give targets, which the whole community plans for," former FEMA Deputy Administrator Timothy Manning said in an interview last week. "The intent of this process is to say, these are the things that will strengthen our national capacity in a crisis.

"I completely applaud FEMA for doing that," said Manning, who ran FEMA's National Preparedness Directorate in the Obama administration and is now a senior adviser at the Pacific Disaster Center, a research group.

FEMA has been in charge of the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic since March 13.

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