

Amazon restricts sale of N95 face masks, surgical gloves to the public

The company said it's now selling these high demand medical supplies exclusively to hospitals and government agencies.

Amazon has stopped selling some face masks, antibacterial wipes and other hard-to-find health care products to the general public, saying it'll sell these items only to governments and health providers during the coronavirus pandemic.

On Amazon's site, some listings for Clorox disinfecting wipes are now restricted, but listings for small-volume sanitizers, disposable face masks and wipes intended for personal use are still available for shoppers. The company said it will continue to evaluate this restricted list going forward.



Supplies of many of these items, especially sanitizers, gloves and masks, have been limited for weeks as health providers and millions of shoppers have stocked up. Now doctors and nurses are sounding the alarm that they're running out of basic protective equipment as they care for a surge of new coronavirus patients.

Amazon said it's hoping to alleviate that strain by selling these items exclusively to government organizations and health care providers. This week it added a note to many of these listings, which include thermometers, face shields and surgical gowns, saying: "Available only for hospitals and government agencies directly responding to COVID-19." COVID-19 diagnostic kits are also restricted. On a webpage explaining the change, the company said it won't be making a profit on the sale of these COVID-19 supplies.

On a separate page describing the change to merchants selling on Amazon, the e-retailing giant said this list of restricted items includes "high-demand medical products like N95 masks, surgical masks, facial shields, surgical gowns, surgical gloves, and large-volume sanitizers."

Amazon has been making sweeping changes to its huge logistics network during the health emergency. It's restricting shipments into its warehouses to focus on basic needs like baby formula and hand sanitizers, while also prioritizing delivery of those items to customers. These changes have helped the company respond to a spike in customer orders, as millions of shoppers are told to stay home during the pandemic, though deliveries have been slower than usual and high-demand items, such as toilet paper and paper towels, have at times gone out of stock.

Earlier Thursday, Amazon said it had put a handful of new health and safety measures in place to protect its warehouse workers during the crisis. The company is now providing face masks to Amazon warehouse employees and instituting temperature checks. It said any N95 masks it gets will either be donated to health care workers or sold at cost to health care or government customers through Amazon Business.

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