

# Coronavirus outbreak: WHO warns of global shortage of face masks and protective suits

Wednesday 12 February 2020, by [BOSELEY Sarah](#) (Date first published: 7 February 2020).

## **Fight against coronavirus being hampered by stockpiling of equipment, says body's chief.**

The fight against the coronavirus epidemic is being hampered by serious global shortages of face masks and protective suits, according to the World Health Organization's director general, who said there was "widespread inappropriate use" by those not on the frontline caring for patients.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called on countries not to stockpile the protective suits that are badly needed in Chinese hospitals and praised companies who had taken the decision to supply surgical masks only to medical professionals.

There are delays of four to six months in supply, said Tedros. "The world is facing severe disruption in the market for personal protective equipment (PPE). Demand is up to 100 times higher than normal, and prices are up to 20 times higher. This situation has been exacerbated by widespread inappropriate use of PPE outside patient care.

"There is limited stock of PPE and we have to make sure we get it to the people who need it most, in the places that need it most." WHO would discourage any stockpiling of PPE in countries that have few coronavirus cases.

The WHO estimated frontline workers would need approximately 7-10% of the world's supply of surgical masks, and possibly more. "Global stocks of masks and respirators are now insufficient to meet the needs of WHO and our partners," he said.

"The first priority is health workers. The second priority is those who are sick or caring for someone who is sick."

He called for the rational use of supplies and the rebalancing of the market. "We all have a part to play in keeping each other safe," he said.

Dr Michael Ryan, the WHO's executive director for emergencies, said the huge demand was producing "opportunities for hoarding, opportunities for gazumping". The entire supply chain was being disrupted, he said.

He pointed out that masks were not always useful for the healthy general public. "Masks don't necessarily protect you, but they do - if you have the disease - stop you from giving it to anybody else," he said.

Some people in the streets are even wearing the N95 and other professional masks that healthcare workers need. "If you see the normal civilian market flooded with N95 type masks and you see doctors and nurses who don't have those, there is a problem," he said.

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**P.S.**

- The Guardian. Fri 7 Feb 2020 18.25 GMT:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/07/who-warns-global-shortage-face-masks-protective-suits-coronavirus>

- Sarah Boseley articles in *The Guardian*:

<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/sarahboseley>

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