

# Global shortage of anti-virus masks: WHO chief

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The world is running out of masks and other protective equipment against the novel coronavirus, the World Health Organization chief warned on Friday.

"The world is facing a chronic shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE)," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the WHO's executive board in Geneva.

WHO said prices for some items were up to 100 times higher than normal, and Tedros told reporters the problem was being made worse by "inappropriate use" of masks by people who were neither sick nor medical staff.

"There are now depleted stockpiles and backlogs of four to six months. Global stocks of masks and respirators are now insufficient to meet the needs of WHO and our partners," he said, adding: "There is a moral issue here."

After speaking to a supply chain group of producers and distributors on Friday, Tedros praised those companies that have promised to sell only to medical staff.

"There is limited stock of PPE and we need to make sure we get it to the people who need it most in the places that need it most," he said, warning against "stockpiling of PPE in countries and areas where transmission is low".

WHO earlier this week said it had started sending masks, gloves, respirators, protective isolation gowns and test kits to countries requiring assistance.

At least 31,000 have now been infected by the virus, which has killed more than 630 people.

Maria Van Kerkhove, head of WHO's Emerging Diseases unit, said that overall some 82 percent of cases were considered mild, 15 percent severe and three percent "critical".

"Less than two percent of the reported cases have died," she said, adding that those who have died tended to be older and have underlying medical conditions.

Tedros also said that some countries were still failing to share clinical data on confirmed cases of the virus and urged them to do so "immediately".

"We have a common enemy which is dangerous and which can bring serious upheaval, social, political and economic. This is the time to fight it and in unison," he said.

Tedros also pointed out that for the past two days the number of reported cases of the virus had declined.

He said this was "good news but we caution against reading too much into that—the numbers could go up again".

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