

Masks go on world tour as Hong Kongers now send supplies abroad

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Hong Konger Adrian W. Chan is hunting for face masks to send to his parents in Canada, an increasingly common sight in a city once stalked by shortages and now trying to lend a hand as the coronavirus spreads overseas.

The international financial hub was one of the first places hit as the virus spread from China, sparking panic buying, shortages and long queues for [face masks](#).

The hoarding and shortages have since eased somewhat and many Hong Kongers are now trying to make sure loved ones abroad receive [face masks](#) as the global pandemic grows.

Chan spent Tuesday night going from store to store on his third shopping trip of the week.

"Unfortunately for the first four or five stores that I visited they ran out of stock," he told AFP.

"I was quite disappointed until I went to the last store. In fact and I managed to buy six packages."

As the [coronavirus](#) has spread, there are now more people infected outside China with Europe and North America the latest epicentres.

Canada has comparatively few cases but Chan is taking no chances.

"My parents are seniors. They are over 60 years old. I do want them to wear masks, just to play safe and prevent an unforeseen situation," he said.

During Chinese New Year in January, when the virus was exploding in central China, Chan was in Canada.

He drove from Vancouver all the way to Seattle to buy masks ahead of his return to Hong Kong.

"But the ironic thing is that now I'm sending them back to Canada," Chan told AFP. "C'est la vie."

Post office queues

At Hong Kong's central [post office](#) earlier this week people formed long queues during lunch break to send hygiene products to loved ones overseas.

"I've come to the post office in the past week every day to send to my friends around the world, mainly outside Asia," said one woman who declined to give her name.

She had sent boxes of masks, non-alcoholic wet wipes and Chinese medicine to friends in France and her family in the Netherlands.

Aiza Galata, a Filipina domestic helper, said she was sending 11 boxes of masks to her family in Manila, which is now locked down due to the virus outbreak.

"In the Philippines, the situation now is a little bit scary, because the virus is spreading," Galata said.

Many Western governments do not recommend wearing a mask unless one is sick.

Specialists say frontline medical staff and the vulnerable must be prioritised amid global shortages.

But in Hong Kong, a city of 7.5 million, experts and the general public have embraced mass mask wearing, especially given asymptomatic people are known to carry and spread the virus.

"In Hong Kong, where it is extremely crowded, very densely populated, wearing surgical masks in public areas and taking public transport essentially is an important step to try to prevent getting respiratory infections," said professor David Hui, a leading expert in respiratory medicine.

A Hong Kong office worker, who gave her surname Tsang, said many friends in Britain were now asking her for supplies.

"You have nothing to lose to wear a mask. Everyone can protect each other, even against the flu".

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