



## Coronavirus: following Commission's call, platforms remove millions of misleading ads

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As part of its commitment to protect consumers online, the European Commission has coordinated a screening ('sweep') of websites, with the aim of finding out where consumers in the EU are being subjected to content promoting false claims or scam products in the context of the coronavirus. The results show that, following the Commission's call, platforms have removed or blocked millions of misleading advertisements or product listings. The sweep – carried out by the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Network – consisted of two parts: a high-level screening of online platforms, and an in-depth analysis of specific advertisements and websites linked to products in high demand because of the coronavirus.

Didier **Reynders**, Commissioner for Justice, said: *"The major online platforms have positively replied to the European Commission's call to address scams and misleading offers and have shown a clear commitment to remove harmful content. However, as this recent sweep has shown, rogue traders continue to find new ways to exploit consumers' vulnerabilities, circumvent algorithmic checks and set up new websites. In the midst of a global pandemic, you need to be aware of this as a consumer – there are no miracle online cures. I am grateful that national consumer authorities remain on high alert and are working together with the Commission to protect consumers online."*

### Main findings

The Consumer Protection Authorities of 27 countries participated in the **high-level screening** of platforms and submitted 126 replies concerning both the companies with which the Commission has been in regular contact and additional national players. Particular attention was given to screening offers linked to protective masks and caps, sanitising gels, testing kits as well as food, food supplements and non-food products with alleged healing effects related to the coronavirus.

In 38 cases, CPC authorities found a number of dubious offers or adverts concerning products misleadingly promoted in the context of the coronavirus, broad claims that a product was able to prevent or cure infection, and excessive prices. In addition, this screening revealed that rogue traders are using new predatory practices that make it more difficult to find them, such as implicit claims of curing qualities of products with pictures or graphic illustrations, or even intentional misspellings to avoid automatic text based filters.

Overall, the screening has shown that the ongoing exchange between the Commission and the major online platforms is bearing fruit. For example, Google has blocked or removed over 80 million coronavirus-related ads (globally), eBay has blocked or removed more than 17 million listings from its global marketplace that violate EU consumer rules; and Amazon observed a 77% decrease in the weekly number of new product listings with coronavirus-related claims compared to March.

The **in-depth sweep** involved 268 websites, 206 of which were flagged for further investigation for potential breaches of EU consumer law.

- 88 websites contained products with claims of alleged healing or preventive effects against the coronavirus;
- 30 websites contained inaccurate claims on the scarcity of products;
- 24 websites were suspected of unfair practices to obtain excessive prices.

The sweep also revealed that in 39 cases the selling price and the unit price were not displayed in an unambiguous, easily identifiable and clearly legible manner. Moreover, CPC authorities also observed that consumers were not provided with clear and comprehensive information on all relevant aspects, such as the identity of the trader (on 58 websites), the geographical address of the trader's establishment (on 62 websites) or the trader's contact details (on 58 websites).

### Next steps

The Commission has today updated its advice to consumers and has called on platforms to remain vigilant and continue with their efforts to give regular feedback to the Commission and consumer authorities. The Commission will coordinate cooperation between CPC authorities and domain registers,

who can be requested to take down harmful websites.

In addition, the Commission will continue cooperation and information exchanges with advertising self-regulatory bodies on the development of automatic tools to find misleading advertisements.

### **Background**

Since the beginning of March, the Commission has been working to protect consumers online from scams and rogue trading practices in the context of the coronavirus. As part of this work, the CPC Network – an EU network of authorities responsible for enforcing EU consumer laws to protect consumers' interests – agreed to rapidly carry out a new sweep, specifically related to the coronavirus.

[EU wide sweeps](#) are carried out annually by the CPC Network on the basis of a common questionnaire prepared by the European Commission. Previous sweep can be found [here](#).

### **More information**

The Commission will continue to provide advice to consumers and traders, monitor rogue trading practices and publish relevant updates [here](#), along with all information on its work to prevent consumer scams related to coronavirus.

More information on the sweep can be found [here](#).

[European Consumer Centres \(ECCs\)](#) provide advice and assistance to the EU citizens on their queries, many of which related to the impact of coronavirus on a service or a good they purchased, you can find them [here](#).

[Factsheet](#) on the [Regulation on consumer protection](#).

[More information](#) on your rights as a consumer in the EU.

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