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CORONAVIRUS/New rules to boost weekly face mask purchase quota

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Taipei, March 2 (CNA) Taiwan residents will soon be allowed to buy an additional surgical face mask a week amid rising production of the masks, which are in high demand to combat the novel coronavirus, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) said Monday.

Starting Thursday, adults will be able to buy three masks per week instead of the current two per week, and children can get five per week, up from four previously.

Food and Drug Administration Director-General Wu Shou-mei (吳秀梅) said the installation of more production lines in recent weeks has increased capacity in Taiwan to around 8.2 million surgical masks per day.

That increase makes it possible for the government to allocate 5.2 million masks per day

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for consumers, up from the previous 3.9 million masks per day, Wu said.

The rest of the masks are reserved for use by medical personnel and epidemic prevention workers.

According to the CECC, each of the more than 6,000 pharmacies or drugstores that are part of the national health insurance (NHI) system will be allotted 600 adult masks per day, up from the original 400.

The amount of children's masks distributed to each drugstore will remain at 200 per day, however, as statistics show surplus stocks of children's masks at almost every drugstore, the CECC said.

As production has risen, stocks of medical supplies have been replenished at hospitals nationwide to at least a 30-day supply of surgical masks and a 25-day supply of N95 masks and medical protective clothing.

The surgical mask rationing system was first launched on Feb. 6 as part of efforts by Taiwan's government to ensure that all residents had access to at least two masks per week amid panic buying of masks to combat the spread of novel coronavirus cases.

Prior to the rationing system, consumers were allowed to buy three surgical masks per person at convenience stores and other retailers, but people complained of long lines and the lack of availability.

Long lines still exist under the new system, but the distribution is more equitable because purchases are registered on consumers' NHI cards, which limits purchases to once per week.

(By Chen Wei-ting and Joseph Yeh)
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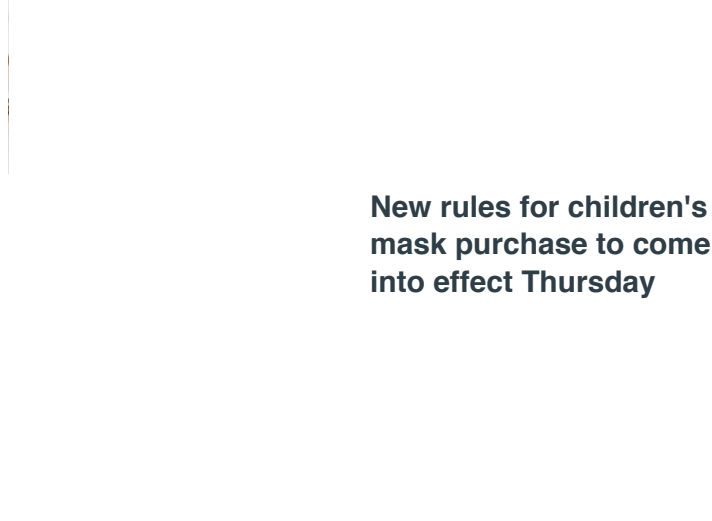
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