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WUHAN VIRUS/Taiwan approves new rationing system for surgical masks

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Taipei, Feb. 3 (CNA) Faced with continued shortages of surgical masks amid fears of the spread of the coronavirus epidemic, Taiwan's government will soon institute a registration system to ration the supply of masks to two per person per week.

Under the system, Taiwanese residents will have to present their national health insurance (NHI) cards to buy face masks at more than 6,000 NHI contracted drugstores or pharmacies, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) announced Monday.

The policy, set to begin Feb. 6, will allow each person to buy two masks a week at a price of NT\$5 per mask, and once an individual makes a purchase, it will be recorded to prevent the same person from buying other masks the same week.

The government began requisitioning the 4 million surgical masks produced by domestic manufacturers every day on Jan. 31, with 2.6 million masks distributed to consumers and

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1.4 million channeled to medical workers and people involved in prevention efforts.

The masks for consumers were being provided through convenience stores, cosmetic retailers, drug stores, and medical supply stores, and their sale was limited to three per customer at a price of NT\$6 per unit.

But that system has led to people being forced to wait in long lines when new masks come in, with many leaving empty-handed when supplies run out.

With the launch of the name-based system, mask sales at the stores will be halted starting at midnight Monday, the CECC said.

(By Ku Chuan and Evelyn Kao)
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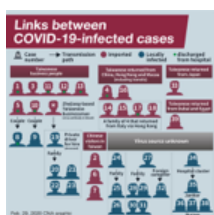
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Breakdown of Taiwan's 39 confirmed COVID-19 cases

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