

Stitch in time: Czechs sew to combat virus mask shortage

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Thousands of Czech women have joined forces via social media to sew face masks at home to help combat the spread of the novel coronavirus amid a dire shortage of medical materials.

A Facebook group called "Czechia sews [face masks](#)" went viral after it was launched on Sunday, drawing 24,000 members in two days as droves of women armed with sewing machines signed up to do battle with the disease.

While experts say wearing masks and gloves as a precaution against the [coronavirus](#) is ineffective, the World Health Organization nevertheless says it is advisable to wear a protective mask in public and health experts are concerned about possible shortages.

There were 434 confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus in the Czech Republic as of Tuesday, including three cured patients, and no deaths.

Health Minister Adam Vojtech admitted last week that the country's [health sector](#) alone lacks up to a million face masks as the number of cases in the EU member of 10.7 million people began to creep up.

Prime Minister Andrej Babis has apologised to the nation for the shortages, vowing to find a remedy as the government sent planes to China to bring back face masks, coronavirus tests and other medical materials.

In the meantime, ordinary Czechs have switched on their sewing machines.

"There's a shortage (of masks), you read about that everywhere, and you can see that many people have joined on social networks and make masks at home," said Alena Vanova, a town hall clerk in the small town of Revnice located southwest of Prague.

'Many masks, fast'

Vanova started to make face masks at home with her daughters on

Tuesday, intended to equip her family and colleagues, but also pensioners.

"It has to be fast, made with pure cotton material and I think even a complete beginner can make it," Vanova told AFP.

Many mask makers are women staying home to care for children after the government shut schools to stem infections, while husbands and boyfriends are also threading their needles in the fight.

The technique is relatively straightforward: people typically sew together specially cut pieces of clean bed sheets folded three times and then fit them with strings to tie up around the back of the head.

Zuzana Hrdinova, a former teacher who recently became a dressmaker, says that making masks is a far cry from stitching together stylish clothes.

"I normally use classic sewing techniques—I sew by hand, stitch, zigzag, while this is mostly about speed, quantity. It has to be solid and you don't really care about design or details," she told AFP.

Mikela Tlusta, a fashion designer, has returned to sewing, something which she left to professional seamstresses years ago.

"It's urgent, we need to make many [masks](#), fast," she told AFP.

"The first mask took a long time and I threw it away. The second one looked weird, but from the third one on, it's been OK.

"This is how I started—I spent days and nights sewing and now the memories are coming back. I've missed it, so it feels great."

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