

# The 2020 Toilet Paper Crisis:

## Everything you Need to Know

### COVID-19 Changed Consumer Shopping Behavior

In the weeks since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic,<sup>1</sup> daily life has been disrupted for nearly everyone. Americans have had to alter or even completely change their daily routines as more than half of the country remains under orders to stay at home due to lockdown measures from their states, cities, and counties.

As Americans grapple with these changes and an uncertain future, we've seen shopping behavior change dramatically. Many have rushed to stock up on essentials like toilet paper and paper towels, and more have started to shift their shopping from in-store to online in an attempt to socially distance themselves.

A recent survey conducted by Red Points showed that 73% of Americans said they were likely to increase their online shopping as a result of fears over the Coronavirus outbreak.<sup>2</sup> Another survey showed that over 30% of consumers already reported making online purchases for things they normally buy at the store.<sup>3</sup>

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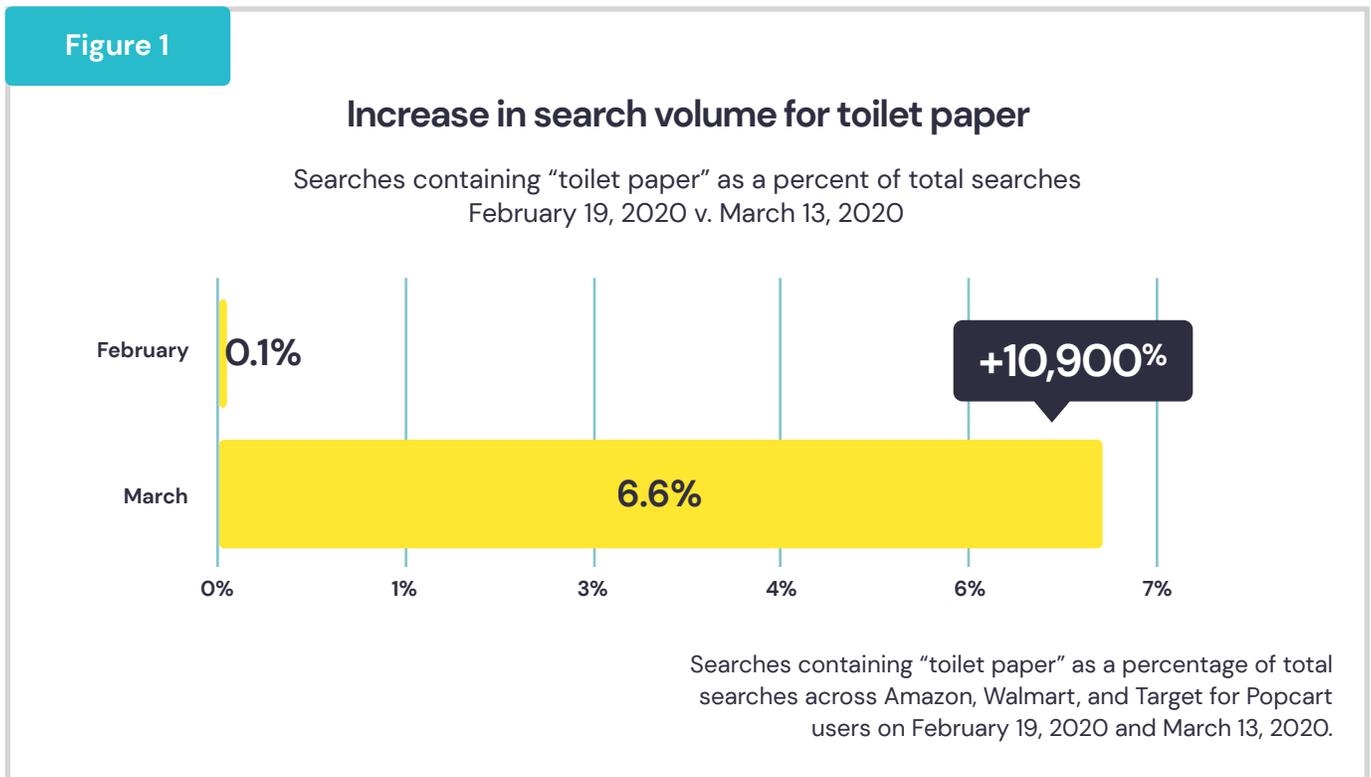
<sup>1</sup> WHO. WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020. <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

<sup>2</sup> Red Points. Impact of COVID-19 on E-Commerce Sales. <https://meet.redpoints.com/lp-284-market-research-impact-of-covid-9-on-ecommerce-sales/>

<sup>3</sup> Numerator. 3/26 Update: The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Consumer Behavior. <https://www.numerator.com/resources/blog/update-impact-coronavirus-covid-19-consumer-behavior>

## Toilet Paper Demand Skyrockets

From what we've seen amongst our own users, online shopping for toilet paper in particular has skyrocketed. From February to March search volume for toilet paper on three of our supported retailers (Amazon, Walmart and Target) increased 10,900%.



## Increased Demand Brings Price Gouging

As demand has increased, in many cases, so have prices. We've seen countless cases of price gouging in critical product categories like hand sanitizer, toilet paper, paper towels and more.

While retailers like Amazon and Walmart have been working to remove some of the most egregiously priced listings after receiving scrutiny by several major media outlets and letters from 33 state attorneys general, it's not uncommon to see cases like the one we've shown below.

Figure 2

### Price gouging example on Amazon

Price change for 20 rolls of Scott Essentials Professional Toilet Paper at Amazon.com (B0040ZOEXU)



For the entire month of February and into the beginning of March, a pack of 20 rolls of Scott Essential Professional Toilet Paper was listed for \$21.44 on Amazon. On March 14th the price started to increase, eventually landing at a high of \$99.99.

#### Availability is Hard to Find

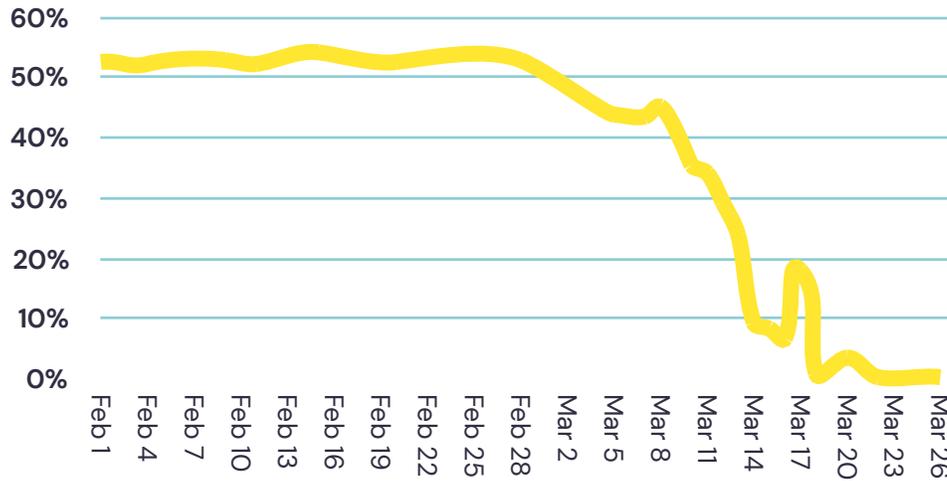
Even when shoppers have been able to avoid this kind of price gouging, availability has been another issue. Trying to find toilet paper in-stock at major retailers like Amazon, Walmart and Target has been nearly impossible.

We track over 300 of the top toilet paper listings from major brands including Charmin, Quilted Northern, Scott and more. On any given day in February, you could expect about half of these listings to be in stock. The in-stock rate has decreased steadily since the beginning of March and has effectively been at zero since March 14th.

Figure 3

### Toilet Paper In-Stock Rate

Based on in-stock toilet paper listings as a share of total listing count  
February 1, 2020 - March 26, 2020

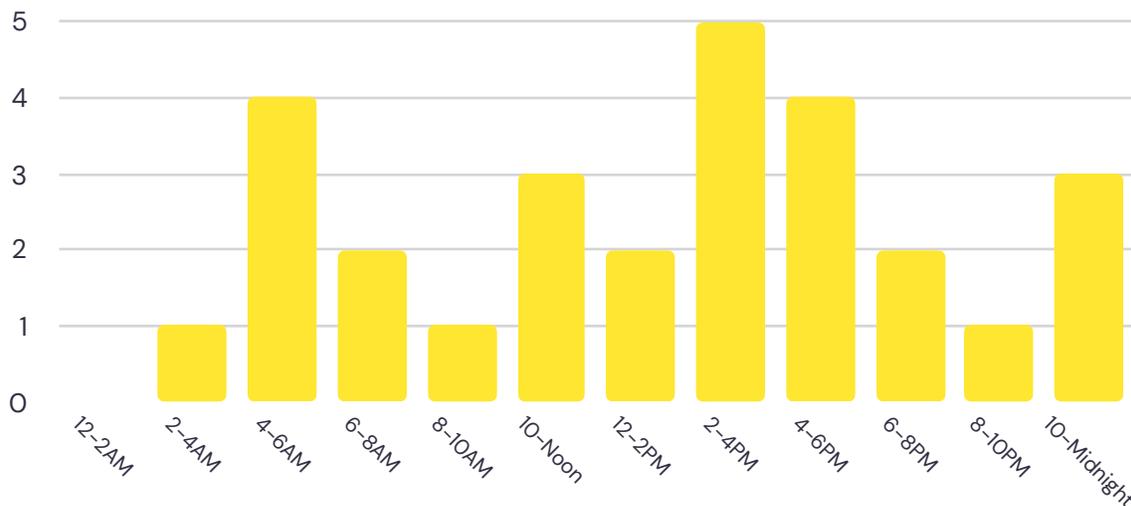


As we've closely tracked availability in this category over the past couple of weeks we've noticed a few patterns. One is that you're most likely to have luck finding in-stock listings on Amazon in the mid-afternoon Eastern Standard Time (EST).

Figure 4

### Best time of day to find toilet paper in stock at Amazon

Based on count of in stock toilet paper listings at Amazon.com  
March 24 - 26, 2020



Based on our tracking of the availability of the top 107 toilet paper SKUs on Amazon

We've also found that when toilet paper comes back in stock, it sells out within minutes or even seconds.

## Retailers Are Barely Keeping Up

Supplies have been selling so fast, retailers have barely been able to keep up and many shoppers have been experiencing frustrating shopping experiences including being unable to add things to their cart (Image 1), having items removed from their cart (Image 2), or having their orders unexpectedly delayed or cancelled after being placed (Image 3).

Image 1: An example message a user received while shopping on [target.com](https://www.target.com)

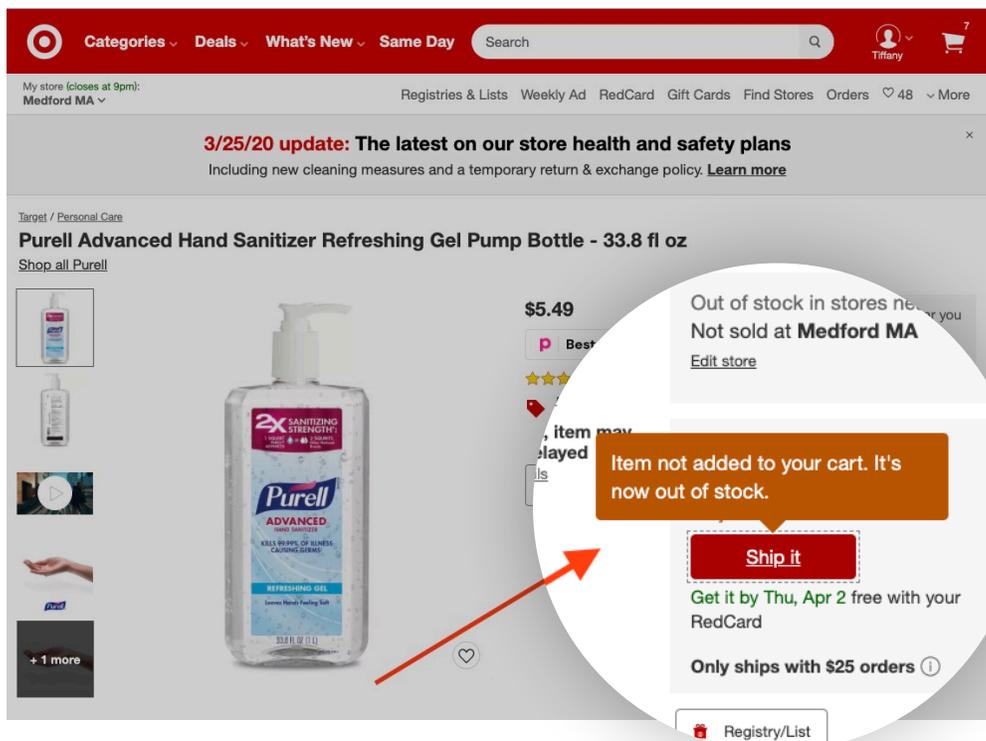


Image 2: An example message a user received while shopping on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

1 Choose shipping addresses

 **There was a problem with some of the items in your order (see below for more information):**

- Bounty Quick-Size Paper Towels, White, 12 Family Rolls = 30 Regular Rolls

| Items   | Qty | Send to   |
|---|-----|---|
|  <b>Bounty Quick-Size Paper Towels, White, 12 Family Rolls = 30 Regular Rolls</b><br>\$30.44<br>Condition: New<br>Sold by: Amazon.com Services LLC<br><a href="#">Delete</a> | 0   | <b>!</b> Sorry, this item is no longer available from the seller you selected. We'll move it to the Saved for Later section of your <a href="#">Cart</a> . From there, you can click the item to return to its product details page and try another seller. |

[Use these addresses](#)

Image 3: An example email a user after placing an order on [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com)

## Your items are delayed.

Hello Tiffany,

Thanks for your recent order. Unfortunately, the items shown below are delayed. We'll ship them as soon as we can and, if possible, upgrade you to faster shipping at no additional cost.

To track the order's progress or if you need to cancel, please view this order in [your account](#). After reviewing the details below, visit our [Help Center](#) if you have any questions. Please do not reply to this email. This mailbox is unmonitored.

**Order number:** 3522002-098169

Sincerely,  
-Your Walmart Customer Care Team

## Online Shopping Tips

From our experience of shopping for ourselves and our families over the past couple of weeks, here are a few tips to consider when shopping for essentials like toilet paper online:

- **Have a full cart ready** at retailers like Walmart and Target that will clear their shipping minimums. Toilet paper listings often go out of stock within minutes or even seconds. If you have to spend time building a cart, the item might be gone by the time you check out!
- **Try checking for availability in the mid-afternoon** EST, when we have seen that toilet paper listings are more likely to go in stock.
- **Plan for longer shipping times.** If you've always been ordering your toilet paper and other household essentials online, you know that it wasn't unreasonable to expect your order at your doorstep within a few days of clicking checkout on major retailers like Amazon, Walmart or Target. Now, however, shipping timelines are extended, in some cases to over a month.

## Methodology

This report was built using Popcart's price tracking technology. Popcart tracks the availability and price of over 100,000 online listings of consumer packaged goods products at the top online retailers including Amazon, Walmart and Target.

## About Popcart

Popcart is a Boston-based tech company that builds tools to help shoppers compare prices and save money when shopping online. Popcart's browser extension is available on the Google Chrome Store. Their Supply Finder to help shoppers see what's in stock right now can be found here: <https://www.thesupplyfinder.com/>.

**popcart**

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