Go read this report about how selling safe masks online is surprisingly hard

A new report from *The New York Times'* Andrew Jacobs digs into how mask policies on tech platforms that have allowed novelty masks like scrunchie masks to flourish while some mask-makers making high-filtration masks have had trouble selling their wares.

Even if you're vaccinated, wearing a mask is still recommended. It seems like a problem, then, that many masks widely advertised on Facebook, Instagram, and Amazon are novelty varieties that might be less safe than medical-grade N95s. Facebook and Amazon say they are following guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Facebook prevented mask sellers from advertising and selling masks to the masses early in the pandemic, when they were in short supply. The idea was to reserve N95s for medical professionals instead. That policy eventually changed so that non-medical masks, face coverings, and plastic shields could be advertised. Some mask-makers who manufacture their own medical-grade masks told Jacobs they aren't able to advertise on the platform, while fabric masks that can fold pocket squares or transform into scrunchies are. Which might not be a problem if these sellers where reaching hospitals directly. Many told Jacobs they're not:

> *"I'd be happy to sell my masks to health care workers, but right now hospitals aren't exactly banging down my door," said Brian Wolin, the chief executive of Protective Health Gear, a year-old company in Paterson, N.J., that has a half*

million unsold N95 masks at its factory.

Amazon’s policies pose a different problem, according to Jacobs’ report. Large manufacturers have an easier time reaching customers on Amazon because the company buys their products in bulk to ship from its own warehouses, Jacobs’ writes. But the company’s policy around selling masks and the algorithms that govern how they appear in search are difficult for smaller companies to navigate. Less safe alternatives like KN95 masks are readily surfaced in search, while other manufacturers offering N95s on Amazon’s storefront have been buried by the algorithm, the report says.

In the end, Jacobs’ piece illustrates a disappointing arrangement: online platforms are frequently the safest way to purchase PPE, but they don’t always provide the safest product.

Check out Jacobs’ report on *The New York Times’* website for the full picture.

https://www.theverge.com/2021/2/26/22303935/mask-selling-facebook-amazon-instagram-kn95-n95