



Response to Commissioner Reynders' inquiry about scam and unfair practices related to COVID-19

Google is fully committed to working with the European Commission and with Member States to support our users during the COVID-19 pandemic—including by providing timely and helpful information to people in Europe, protecting people from misinformation, enabling productivity for remote workers and students, and advancing health research.

We strive to support a healthy digital advertising ecosystem—one that is trustworthy and transparent, and works for users, advertisers, and publishers. Our policies are designed not only to abide by laws, but also to ensure a safe and positive experience for our users. We use a combination of automated and human evaluation to ensure that the ads we are serving on behalf of advertisers comply with these policies.

This system is overseen by our Trust and Safety team, which works around the clock and across the globe to safeguard our users from phishing, conspiracy theories, malware, and misinformation, and we are constantly on the lookout for new threats.

To that end, we have implemented a temporary ban on all protective face mask ads and, in addition, we are taking action against similar ads in other product categories that are potentially harmful and would violate our Dangerous or Derogatory Content or our Misleading Claims policies. This includes ads making misleading claims about prevention or cures. In addition, under our policies, we treat the COVID-19 pandemic as a sensitive event¹ for Google Ads. As part of our enforcement of this policy, we do not allow Google Ads to run on our platforms where it appears an advertiser may be engaged in price gouging or where the ads contain or target certain keywords, regardless of ad or site content, and we have blocked millions of such ads over the past weeks. We make exceptions for ads from legitimate government organizations and health agencies, and are looking to expand these exceptions shortly as we realize that COVID-19 is becoming a crucial subject for many sectors and in political discourse—all while continuing to protect users by otherwise enforcing the policies mentioned above.

¹ https://support.google.com/adspolicy/answer/6015406?hl=en&ref_topic=1626336



In the past few weeks, we have unfortunately seen a number of opportunistic advertisers attempt to run such abusive ads on our platforms. We have set up a dedicated internal task force to combat this issue, and, as noted, have removed millions of infringing ads in the past weeks alone. We're monitoring the situation closely and will continue to make real-time adjustments to our policies and enforcement efforts to protect our users.

Similarly, on YouTube, we are working to quickly remove content (beyond ads) related to COVID-19 that violates our policies. YouTube's "Harmful or dangerous content policy"² prohibits content promoting dangerous remedies or cures—e.g., videos that claim harmful substances or treatments can have health benefits. Our policies relating to coronavirus content also prohibit recommending medically unsubstantiated treatments in place of seeking medical treatment—e.g., visiting a doctor or the hospital—as well as content that advises viewers to act against WHO or local health authority advice around social distancing. Beginning April 2, YouTube creators in our YouTube Partner Program are able to monetize COVID-19 content as long as the content does not violate our Community Guidelines or the additional Advertiser-Friendly Content Guidelines³ we have in place for monetization of COVID-19 content. These guidelines prohibit monetization of content that encourages non-medical tests or exams for COVID-19; promotes dangerous remedies or cures; touts false/unsubstantiated claims about the cause; or makes claims about the origin or spread of COVID-19 that contradict scientific consensus.

As with Google Ads, teams at YouTube have manually reviewed and removed thousands of videos and comments touting dangerous or misleading coronavirus information in violation of the Community Guidelines since early February. We are also actively monitoring trends around COVID-19 content on YouTube to ensure that our policies and enforcement evolve as the content does.

In addition to our work to enforce our community guidelines, YouTube is showing users information panels about COVID-19 when they search for or watch videos about COVID-19 and as of March 23, we have delivered more than 2 billion impressions of these COVID-19 information panels. For the first time, YouTube is also using its home page to show info panels related to COVID-19.

² <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2801964?hl=en>

³ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9803260>



Finally, we announced⁴ on March 27th that in addition to these efforts within YouTube and Google Ads, we will also work with governments around the globe to help them promote authoritative public information about COVID-19 through our Google Ad Grants Crisis Relief program. Under this program, we are providing \$250 million in donated ad grants to the WHO and government agencies globally. We are also donating YouTube ad space to governments in impacted regions to help them educate and inform their local communities.

These efforts fit within the broader framework of Google's and YouTube's efforts to act responsibly to protect consumers and respond to this ongoing crisis, in Europe and across the globe. You can find more information about our work to that end in dedicated blog posts that our CEO Sundar Pichai posted on March 6th⁵ and March 10th⁶.

Please note that the contents of this document reflect our work as of April 3rd, 2020. We expect our response to continue to evolve over the coming days and weeks.

⁴<https://www.blog.google/inside-google/company-announcements/commitment-support-small-businesses-and-crisis-response-covid-19/>

⁵ <https://www.blog.google/inside-google/company-announcements/coronavirus-covid19-response/>

⁶ <https://www.blog.google/inside-google/company-announcements/covid-19-how-were-continuing-to-help/>