



UK Tissue Supply – joint statement in response to concerns about supply shortages by the Confederation of Paper Industries and the Paper Industry Technical Association

No need to panic buy or stockpile – the market continues to operate normally.

UK tissue market. Consumers can be reassured that the present coronavirus crisis has had no immediate impact on the UK tissue industry, tissue manufacturing, wholesale stock levels, the industry supply chain or supply to retailers.

Toilet tissue. The coronavirus in itself has no impact (or likely impact) on the actual demand for toilet tissue and it follows there is no need to panic buy or stockpile. Manufacturing and distribution continue to operate normally and retail stocks are being replenished.

Hand tissues. Again the coronavirus has had no impact on manufacturing or supply chains, with products still being distributed to retailers as normal. Manufacturers have increased production to cope with strong demand triggered by additional hand drying and increased hand tissue use stemming from heightened concerns over the airborne spread of disease. Additional product is now reaching retailers.

Hand washing. Public Health advice strongly recommends frequent and thorough washing of hands. After washing, hands must be thoroughly dried as any remaining virus spreads more easily on damp hands. Additionally, thoroughly drying with paper towels physically abrades any remaining virus from hands, with safe disposal of used paper towels through waste disposal systems.

Catch it, Bin it, Kill it! With the airborne spread of virus being one of the distribution vectors, the importance of using hand tissues to catch coughs and sneezes to help with infection control has again been highlighted.

Using paper towels reduces the risk of airborne viruses that may be caused by other hand drying systems. Certainly in health care critical locations (such as hospitals, care homes and the food supply industry), disposable paper towels should always be the preferred method of hand-drying to minimise the risk of cross-contamination – a finding reinforced by several scientific studies.¹

The UK tissue industry. The UK used around 1.25m tonnes of hygiene paper in 2019; more than half in the form of toilet tissue and the remainder as hand, facial, industrial and sanitary tissues. Around 60% of this tissue was made in the UK (seventeen tissue mills) with the balance being imported. Because of the light-weight and bulk of the shelf-ready product, most international trade is in the form of multi-tonne parent reels, ready for conversion into shelf-ready rolls and packs closer to the end market. This conversion can happen either at paper mills or separate facilities.

Raw Materials. Tissue is generally made from sustainable wood fibres – either recycled or virgin. Recycled fibres are largely sourced from within the UK, or close-by European countries. Paper tissue is normally a blend of fibres, mostly conifer and plantation-grown eucalyptus sourced from Europe, north or south America.

Imports from China. Some press reports have incorrectly suggested large volumes of tissue are imported from China – this is not true. As part of a global market, there are some exports to the UK, with all transported by ship taking at least four weeks to arrive.

More statistical information on the UK tissue market is attached.

¹ For reference and background - <https://europeantissue.com/blog/multisite-hospital-study-demonstrates-hand-drying-method-can-affect-risk-of-bacterial-dissemination/>