

Netflix and YouTube reduce resolution as virus hits web

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The streaming giant will begin reducing bit rates across its streams in Europe for 30 days

Netflix and YouTube will reduce the default image quality of streaming video in Europe to ease pressure on the internet, the firms said Friday, as demand soars with millions confined to their homes over coronavirus

fears.

EU commissioner for the digital economy Thierry Breton urged internet giants to switch from high definition to the former standard definition to reduce file sizes while stranded householders seek entertainment as well as news about the epidemic.

Late Thursday, entertainment platform Netflix agreed, and on Friday Google's video-sharing service YouTube said it would follow suit, although videos viewed on the site from a European connection on Friday by AFP were still defaulting to high definition mode.

"While we have seen only a few usage peaks, we have measures in place to automatically adjust our system to use less network capacity," a Google spokesperson said.

"Following the discussion between Google's CEO, Sundar Pichai, YouTube's CEO Susan Wojcicki and Commissioner Thierry Breton we are making a commitment to temporarily switch all traffic in the EU to Standard Definition by default."

Separately, Netflix will "begin reducing bit rates across all our streams in Europe for 30 days," a spokesperson for the streaming giant said in a statement.

"We estimate that this will reduce Netflix traffic on European networks by around 25 percent while also ensuring a good quality service for our members," the statement added.

With wide-ranging lockdowns and quarantines, schools, shops and borders closed and gatherings banned, people across Europe are increasingly turning to the internet to stave off boredom.

But the huge file sizes of high definition offerings from web giants like Netflix, Disney Plus, Hulu, HBO and Amazon are slowing the web, Breton warned.

"Teleworking and streaming help a lot but infrastructures might be in strain," he said in a tweet Thursday, calling for online platforms to switch to streaming in standard definition instead of HD.

Gamers breathed a sigh of relief on Wednesday after the end of an hours-long network outage that affected Nintendo's online games and prompted despair from users.

"Only a few days into the coronavirus self-isolation and Nintendo servers are already down... oh dear god," tweeted one.

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