

Amazon threatens to halt key French centres after court ruling

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US online retailer Amazon says its operations in France are under threat following a local court ruling on worker health measures during the coronavirus outbreak

Online retailer Amazon warned Wednesday it may be forced to halt activity at its distribution centres and reduce service in France following

a court ruling on measures to slow the spread of the new coronavirus among its workers.

The US e-commerce giant said it would appeal the Tuesday ruling that it can deliver only essential goods while it evaluates its workers' risk of coronavirus exposure.

In the meantime, it said: "Our interpretation suggests that we could be forced to suspend activity at our distribution centres in France."

The facilities are key in preparing orders submitted online for delivery to clients.

A court outside Paris ruled Tuesday that Amazon France had "failed to recognise its obligations regarding the security and health of its workers" in the facilities where hundreds of staff work.

While carrying out a health evaluation, Amazon can prepare and deliver only "food, hygiene and [medical products](#)," the court said.

The injunction must be carried out within 24 hours, or Amazon France could face fines of one million euros (\$1.1 million) per day.

Amazon has one month to carry out the evaluation.

The firm said the ruling left it "perplexed given the concrete evidence which was submitted concerning the [security measures](#) put into place to protect our employees," including temperature checks, physical distancing orders and use of personal protective equipment.

Amazon offers a wide variety of goods on its website, both those which it sells directly, and those which it sells on behalf of other firms.

"Currently, we are continuing to operate in the country and doing everything possible to maintain the level of service," the company said in a statement in French.

'Restrict an essential service'

"However, without the possibility to use our distribution centres in France, we will be forced to restrict a service which has become essential for millions of people across the country which want access to products that they need during the crisis," it added.

France, like many other countries, has closed all non-essential businesses, and only supermarkets and pharmacies are open in many areas.

Online retailers like Amazon have continued to sell a full range of products now unavailable elsewhere, and in many countries Amazon has added thousands of staff to meet a surge in orders from people confined to their homes.

Amazon France's biggest labour union took the company to court saying workers were being forced to work in [close proximity](#).

Amazon, which in February employed 6,500 permanent staff and 3,600 temporary employees at six French sites, insisted that it was properly respecting safety standards.

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