



1 YEAR LATER: COMPARING PRE-PANDEMIC PRICES TO TODAY'S ON AMAZON

REVIEW OF 750 PRODUCTS SHOWS HOW PRICES ON
ESSENTIALS FLUCTUATED DURING COVID-19



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New Year has just begun, and the COVID-19 pandemic still rages in the United States. It's difficult to comprehend that almost a full year has passed since this virus first led to the stockpiling of personal protective equipment and empty store shelves. Americans have witnessed shortages of a range of household and medical products -- from toilet paper to hand sanitizers. And as cases surge by the tens of thousands in the United States every day, it remains as important as ever that Americans have access to the products they need to stay safe and as comfortable as possible.

Since the start of the pandemic, U.S. PIRG Education Fund has focused on the problem of price gouging, using price tracking tools, as well as direct visits to retailers' web sites and brick and mortar stores. Our coverage has led to increased reporting by consumers to their state attorneys general, as well as new and strengthened price gouging laws in states such as California, Massachusetts and Colorado. (1-3) In addition, Amazon has vowed that it is cooperating with law enforcement, and has zero tolerance for price gouging on its site.

As the country approaches the one-year mark since the start of the pandemic, we've revisited this issue to show how prices on essential supplies now compare with prices on the same listings exactly one year ago. By comparing pre-pandemic prices to today's, we can provide insight into how Amazon has or has not addressed price spikes on its site.

This report is U.S. PIRG Education Fund's most extensive look at price gouging to date and includes data from 15 product categories, with 50 listings per category, totaling 750 products. For each product, we looked at the price of the listing on Dec. 1, 2019, and the price again on Dec. 1, 2020. All data comes from the product listings that have been tracked on Amazon the longest, with the shortest time period being at least one year. That means that this report doesn't address those opportunistic sellers who began listing items in response to the pandemic.

All products are fulfilled by Amazon, a third-party seller or, in some cases, both. In cases where a listing had more than one set of prices, we recorded both and calculated them as separate listings.

KEY FINDINGS

Not all products included in this report are explicitly protected under current price gouging laws, meaning that some price increases due to heightened demand can be expected. Nevertheless, items that are not considered PPE or essential supplies still serve an important purpose as a result of stressful pandemic circumstances, and sellers should remain aware of the effect huge price spikes can have on their customers. These products include patio heaters for socially distanced gatherings, computer monitors for employees adjusting to a long-term work-from-home environment and mesh WiFi systems to improve internet access in a home.

- Out of the listings collected, 409 saw price increases of more than 20 percent, and 136 at least doubled in price.
- Across the 15 product categories, the highest price increases ranged from \$13.10 to \$4,000.
- Of the 409 listings with price increases of more than 20 percent, approximately one in seven were sold directly by Amazon.
- Patio heaters showed the 10 largest price increases by percentage.
- In seven product categories, at least half of the listings increased by more than 20 percent over the year.
- In six product categories, at least 20 percent of the listings doubled in price.

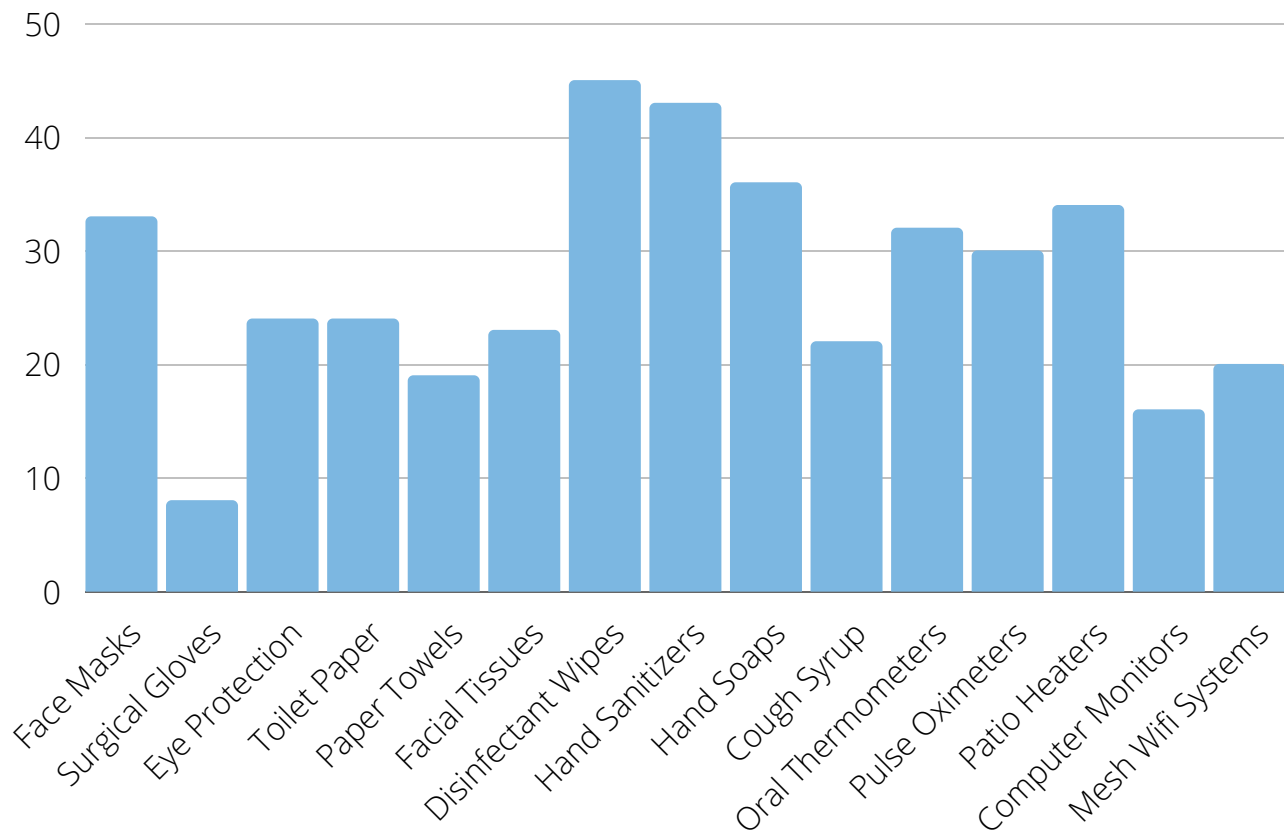
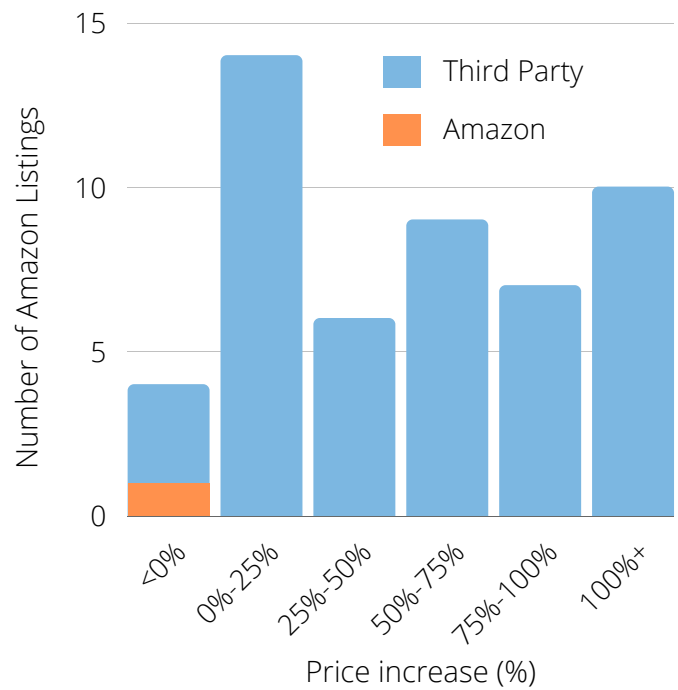


Figure 1: Number of listings out of 50 products on Amazon with price increases of more than 20 percent

Cloth Masks

In the past year, 66 percent of the cloth face masks in our analysis increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 20 percent at least doubled in price. Most are individual, washable cloth masks. Amazon directly sold none of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on a face mask was \$13.10 -- from \$12.89 to \$25.99. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the price as of Dec. 28.



66%

of cloth face mask prices increased by more than 20 percent.

20%

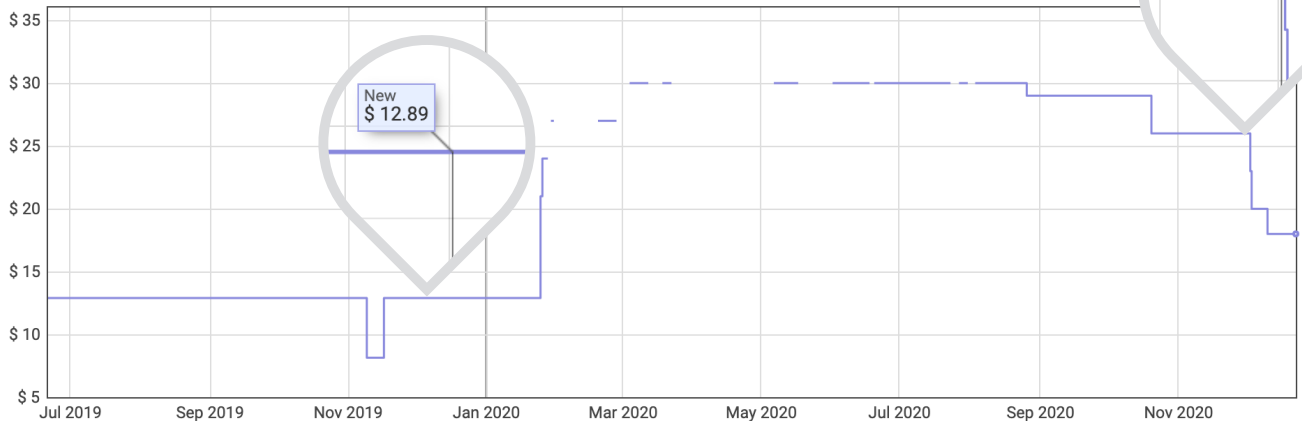
of cloth face mask prices at least doubled.



Cotton Face Mask with replaceable PM2.5 Activated Carbon Mask for Running, Traveling, Cycling Washable and Reusable War (NEW11) ★★★★★ 4.5 (116 reviews)
by SPRINGSEAN

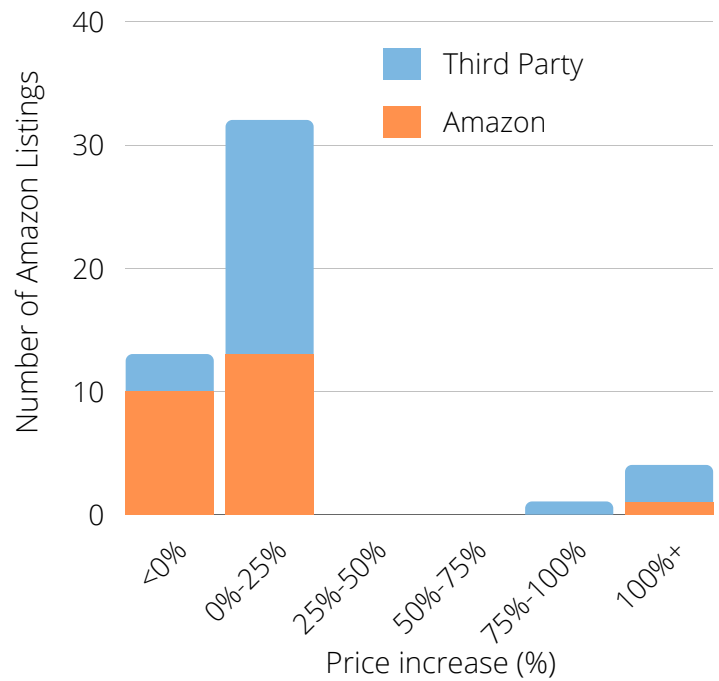
New: **\$ 17.99** (last update: 8 hours ago ↻, last price change: 12 days ago)

[Amazon Price History](#) [Track product](#) [Data](#) [Variations](#) [amazon.com](#) [ebay](#) → [Find related Deals](#)



Surgical Gloves

In the past year, 16 percent of the surgical gloves increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 8 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 13 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on surgical gloves was \$184.23 -- from \$65.65 to \$249.88 -- for a box of 1,000 pairs of gloves. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



16%

of surgical glove prices increased by more than 20 percent.

8%

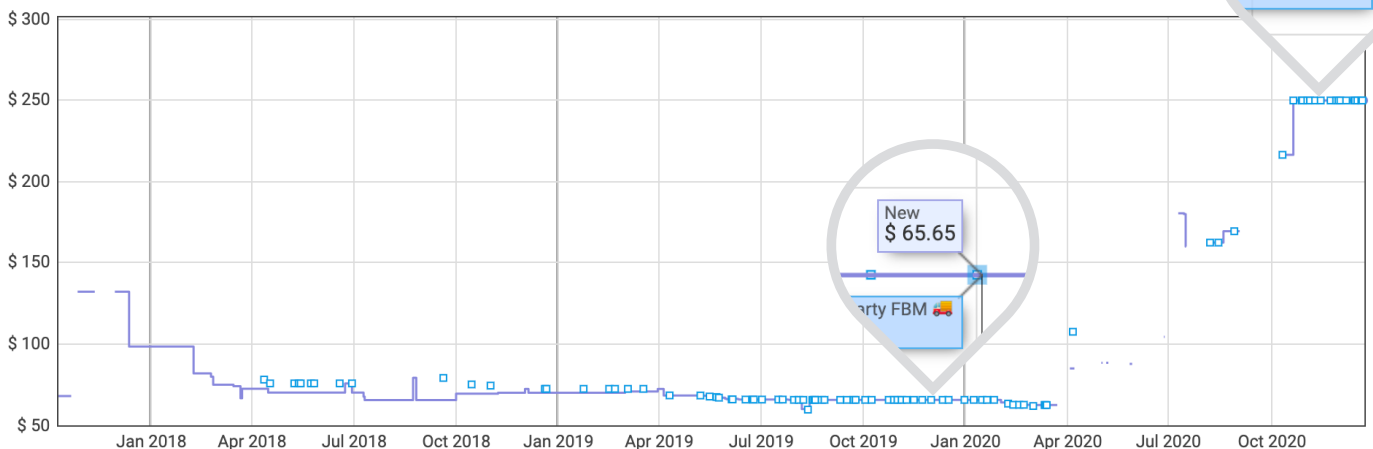
of surgical glove prices at least doubled.



SemperGuard BKNF106 SemperForce Gloves, Black, 2X-Large, 1000/Carton ★★★★★ 5.0 (1 reviews)
by SEMPERMED USA, INC.

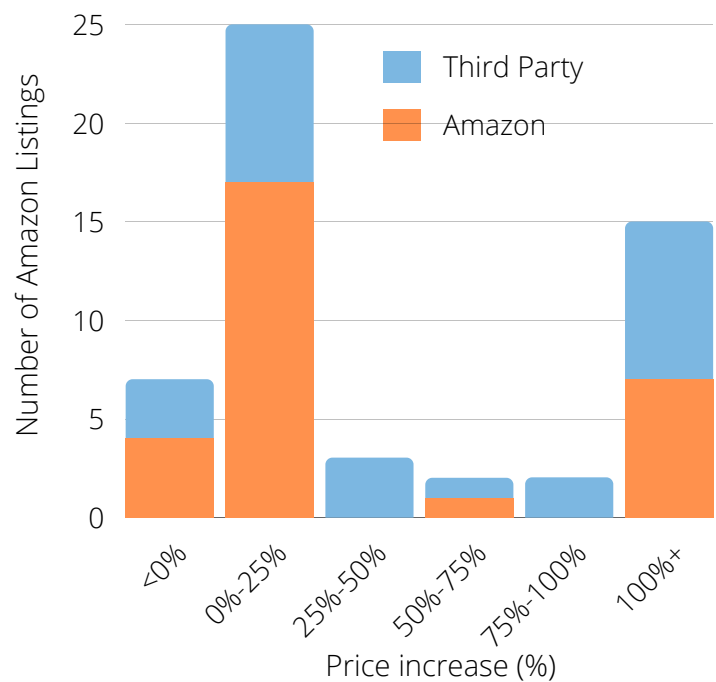
New: **\$ 249.88** (last update: 2 hours ago ↕, last price change: 11 days ago)

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Eye Protection

In the past year, 44 percent of the protective eye glasses increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 28 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 38 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on protective eye glasses was \$65.78 -- from \$19.31 to \$85.09 -- for one pair of goggles. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



44%

of glasses prices increased by more than 20 percent.

28%

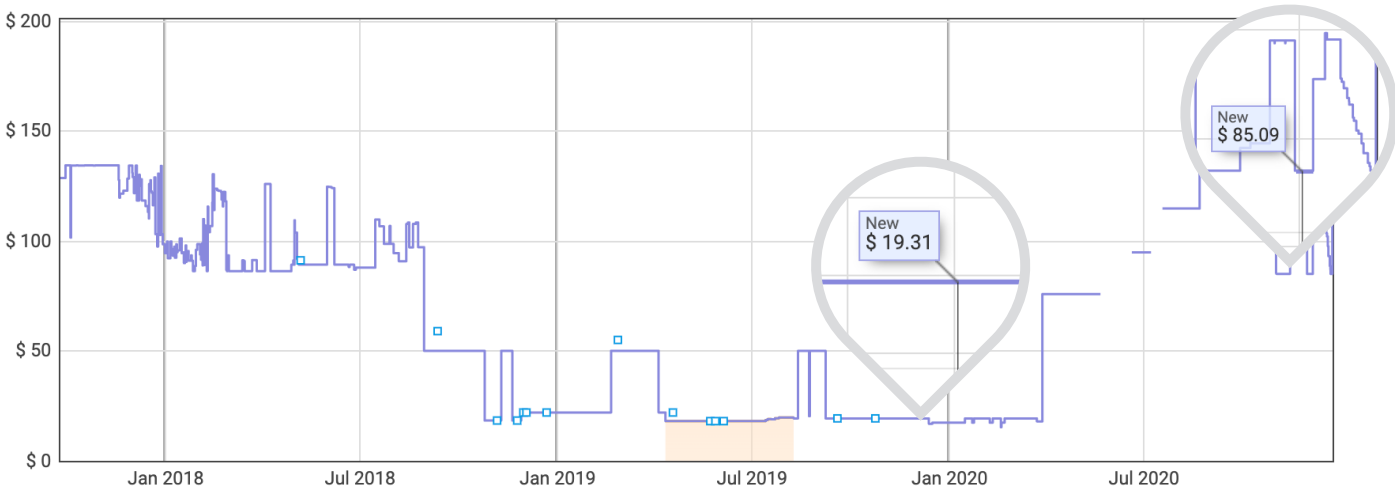
of glasses prices at least doubled.



Pyramex Indoor/Outdoor Dust Goggle, Anti-Fog by Pyramex

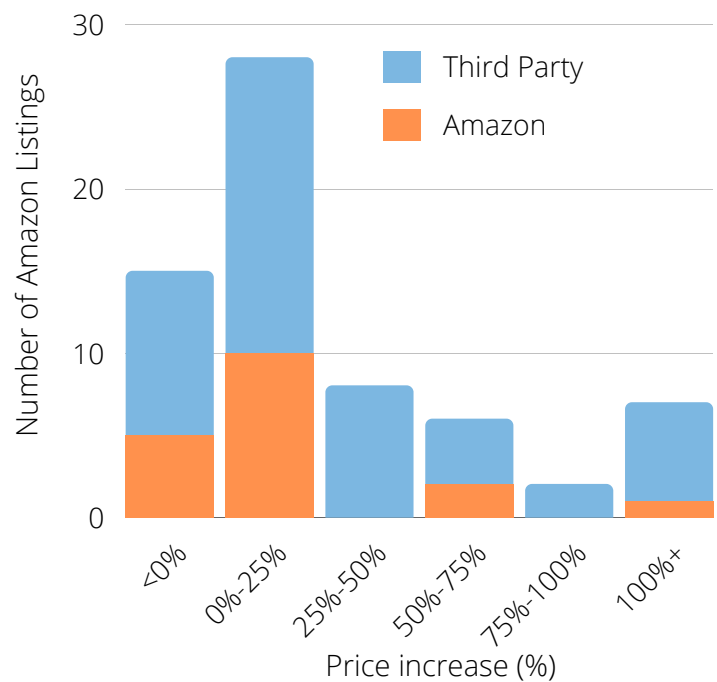
New: **\$ 153.17** (last update: 55 minutes ago, last price change: 55 minutes ago)

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Toilet Paper

In the past year, 36 percent of the toilet paper increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 11 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 13 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on toilet paper was \$79.04 -- from \$30.95 to \$109.99 -- for a 36-roll package. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



36%

of toilet paper prices increased by more than 20 percent.

11%

of toilet paper prices at least doubled.

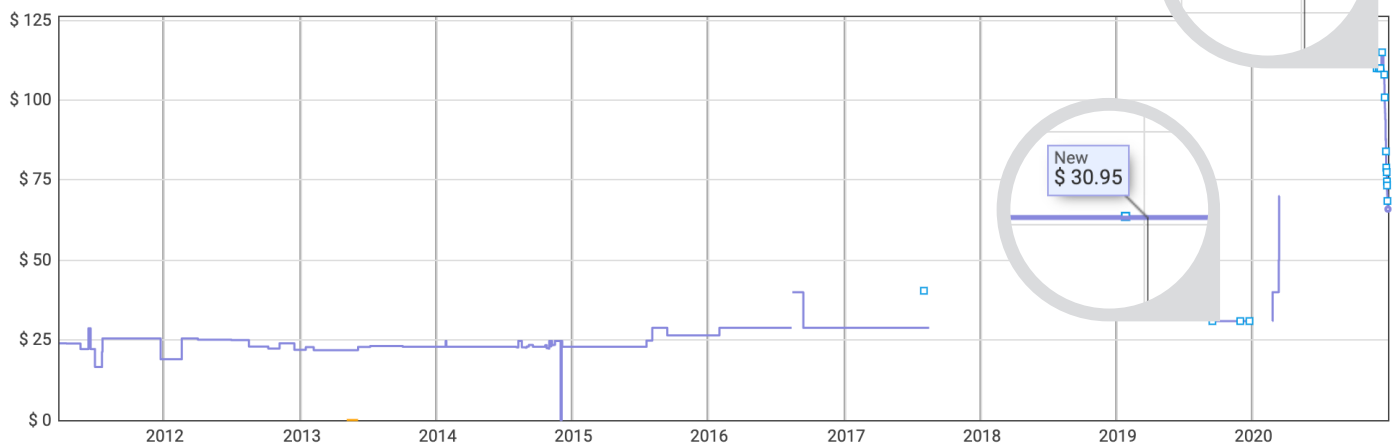


Charmin Ultra Soft 36 Family Rolls, 82 Regular Rolls ★★★★☆ 4.4 (48 reviews)

by Procter & Gamble

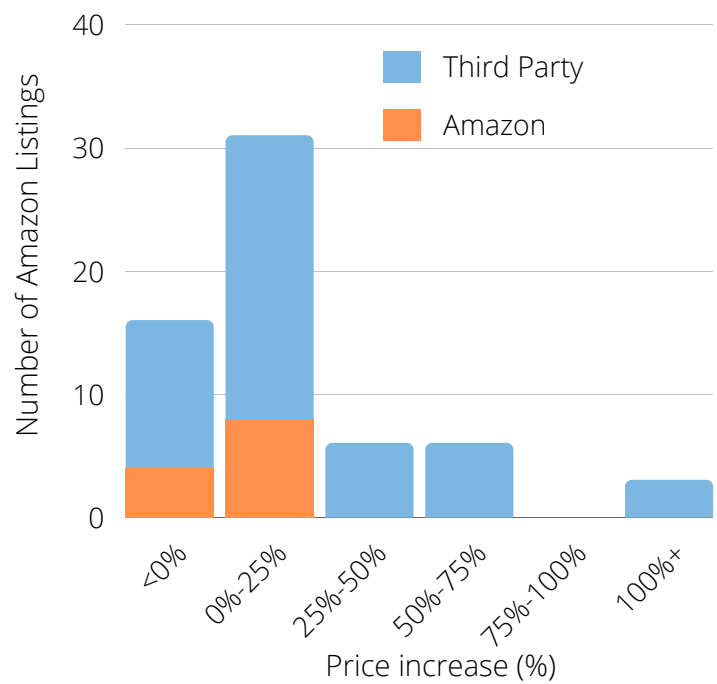
New: \$ 65.95 (last update: 1 hour ago ↻, last price change: 1 hour ago)

[Amazon Price History](#) [Track product](#) [Data](#) [amazon.com](#) [ebay](#) → [Find related Deals](#)



Paper Towels

In the past year, 31 percent of the paper towels increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 5 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 5 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on paper towels was \$66.42 -- from \$23.56 to \$89.98 -- for a 12-roll package. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



31%

of paper towel prices increased by more than 20 percent.

5%

of paper towel prices at least doubled.

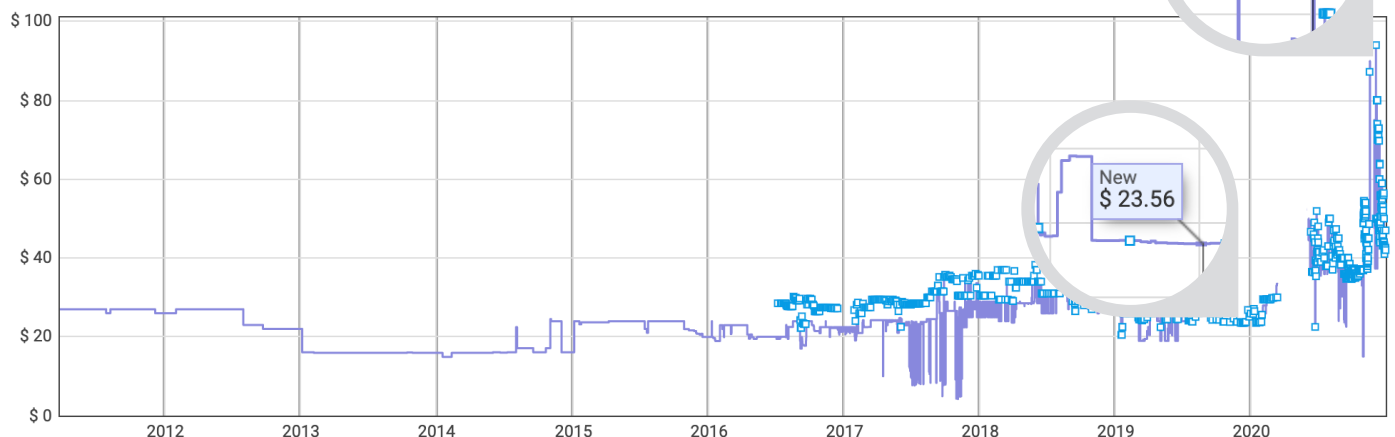


Bounty Select A Size Paper Towels, 12 Mega Rolls ★★★★★ 4.7 (1135 reviews)

by Bounty

New: **\$ 47.00** (last update: 5 hours ago ↻, last price change: 5 hours ago)

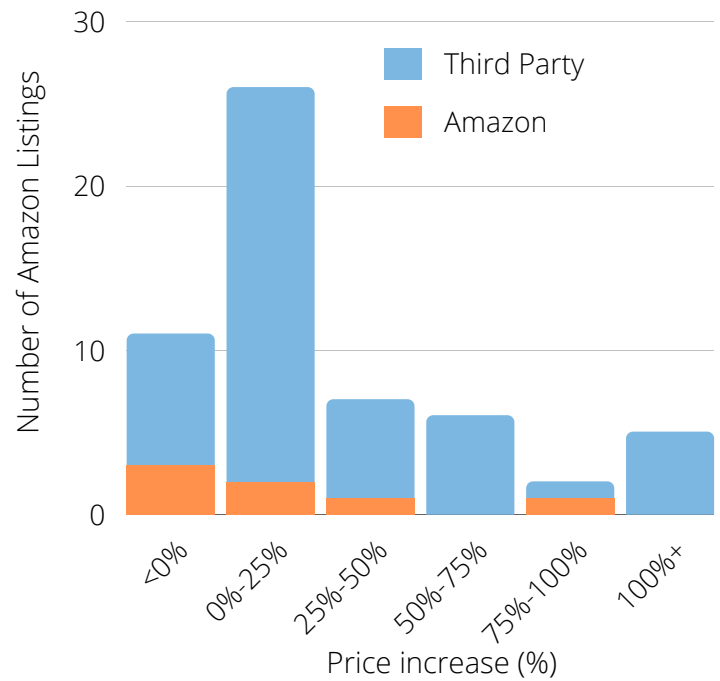
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Facial Tissues



In the past year, 40 percent of the facial tissues increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 9 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 9 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on facial tissues was \$46.97 -- from \$65.03 to \$112 -- for a package with 24 boxes. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



40%

of facial tissue prices increased by more than 20 percent.

9%

of facial tissue prices at least doubled.

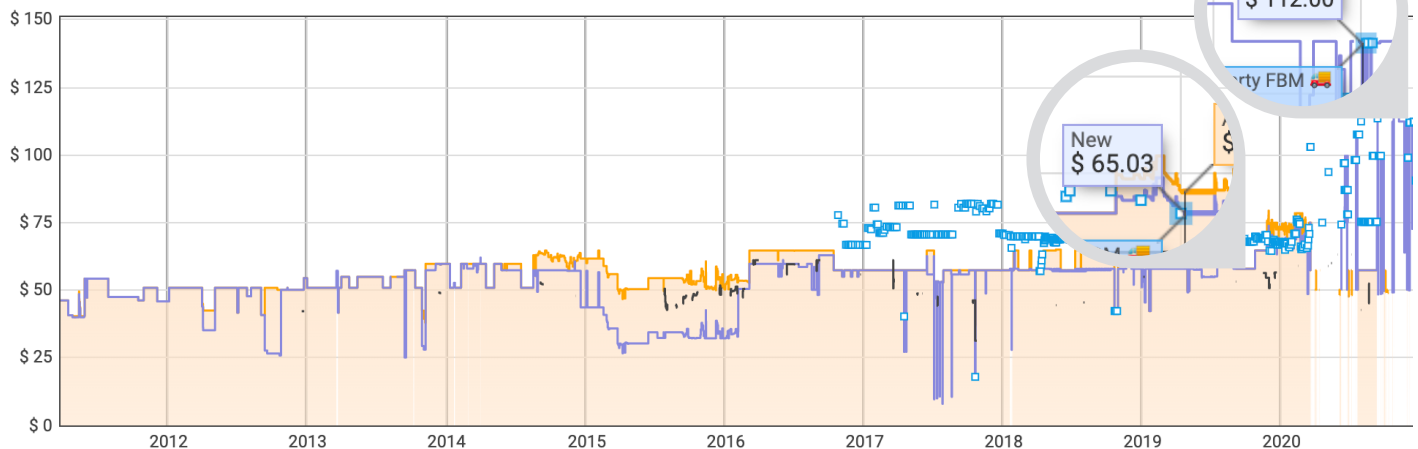


Green Forest 100% Recycled Facial Tissue, 175 count (Pack of 24) ★★★★★ 4.6 (148 reviews)

by Green Forest

New: **\$ 88.01** eBay New: **\$ 76.59** (last update: 2 hours ago ↻, last price change: 2 hours ago)

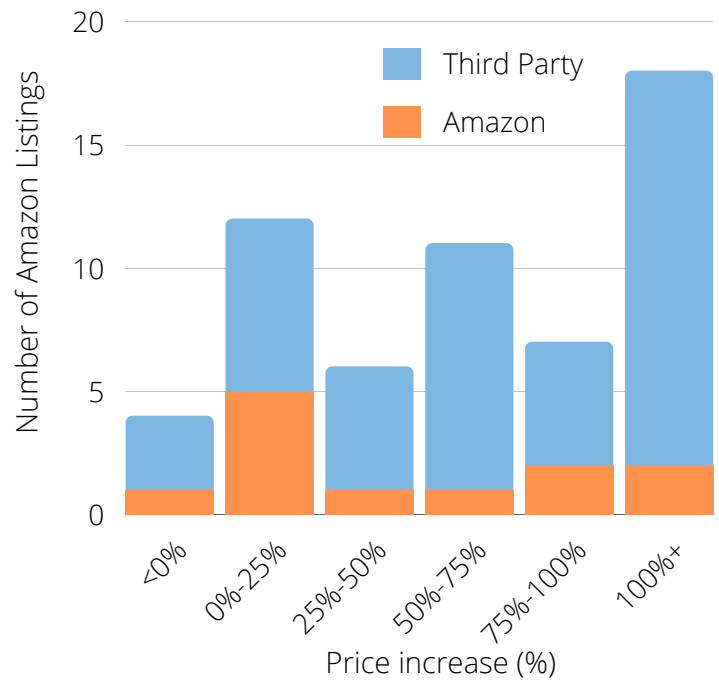
Amazon Price History Track product Data amazon.com ebay → Find related Deals



Disinfectant Wipes



In the past year, 78 percent of the disinfectant wipes increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 31 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 16 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on disinfectant wipes was \$226.59 -- from \$73.40 to \$299.99 -- for a package with 12 containers of wipes. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



78%

of disinfectant wipe prices increased by more than 20 percent.

31%

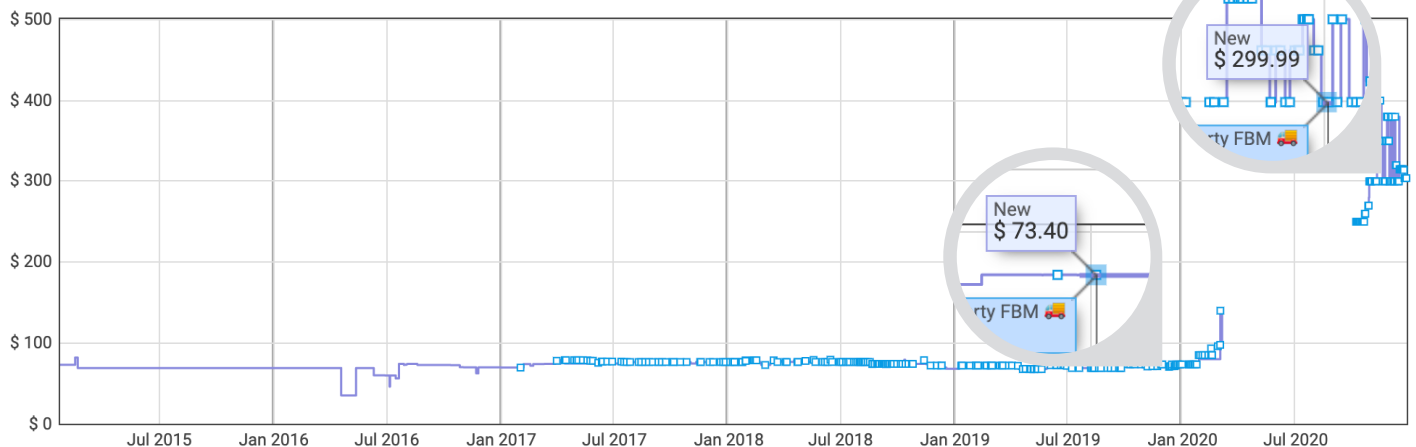
of disinfectant wipe prices at least doubled.



Sani-Cloth Plus Hard Surface Disinfectant Wipe, 160 Count, Q89072 - Case of 12 = 1920 Wipes ★★★★★ 4.4 (7 reviews) by PDI

New: **\$ 303.99** (last update: 9 hours ago, last price change: 9 hours ago)

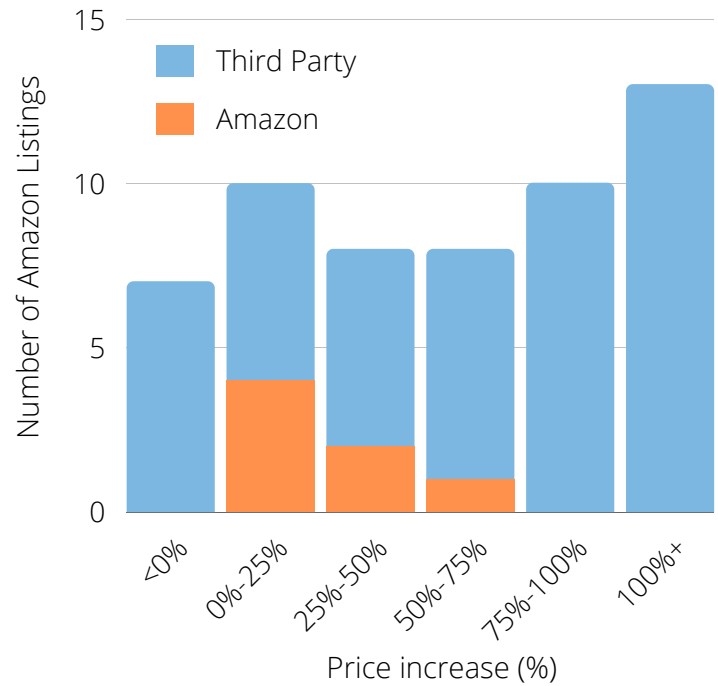
[Amazon Price History](#) [Track product](#) [Data](#) [amazon.com](#) [ebay](#) → [Find related Deals](#)



Hand Sanitizers



In the past year, 77 percent of the hand sanitizers increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 23 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 9 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on hand sanitizers was \$145.07 -- from \$33.13 to \$178.20 -- for one 40.5-ounce bottle. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



77%

of hand sanitizer prices increased by more than 20 percent.

23%

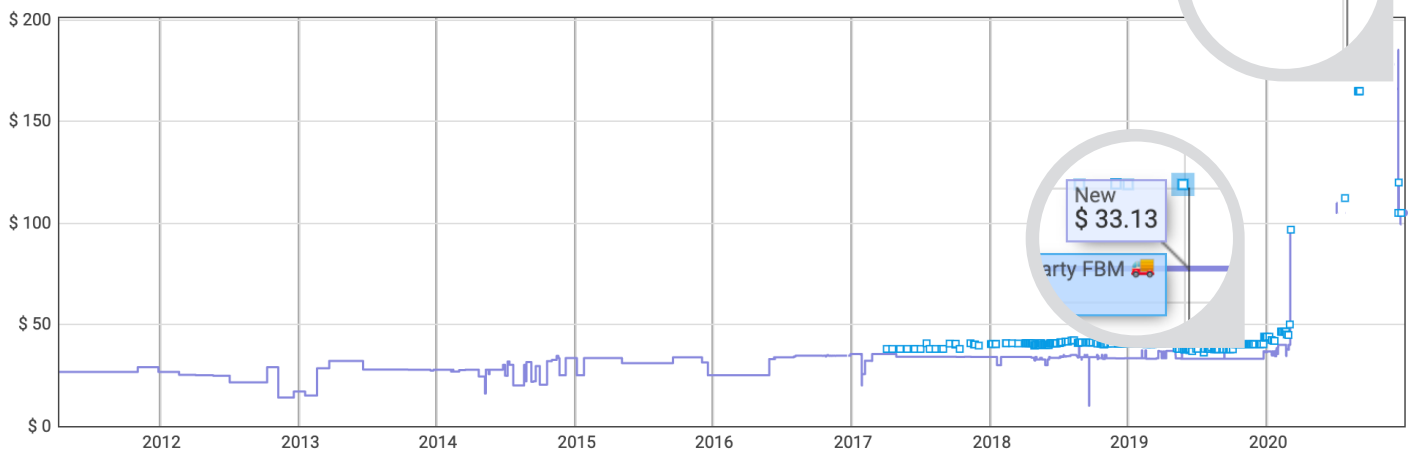
of hand sanitizer prices at least doubled.



PURELL Advanced TFX Instant Hand Sanitizer Refill ★★★★★ 4.5 (21 reviews)
by PURELL

New: **\$ 105.02** (last update: 2 hours ago, last price change: 2 hours ago)

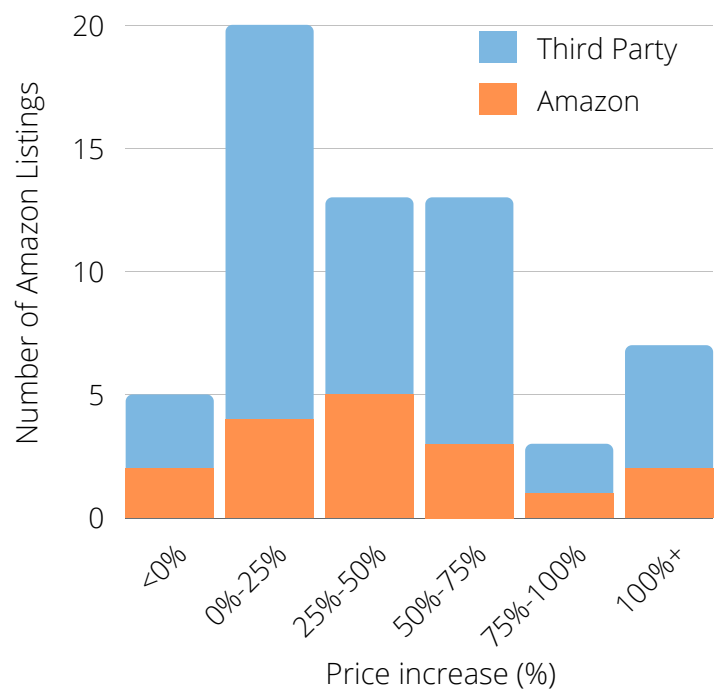
Amazon Price History Track product Data amazon.com ebay → Find related Deals



Hand Soaps



In the past year, 59 percent of the hand soaps increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 11 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 31 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. In one case, a three-pack of hand soap increased by \$47.37 -- from \$25.57 to \$72.94. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



59%

of hand soap prices increased by more than 20 percent.

11%

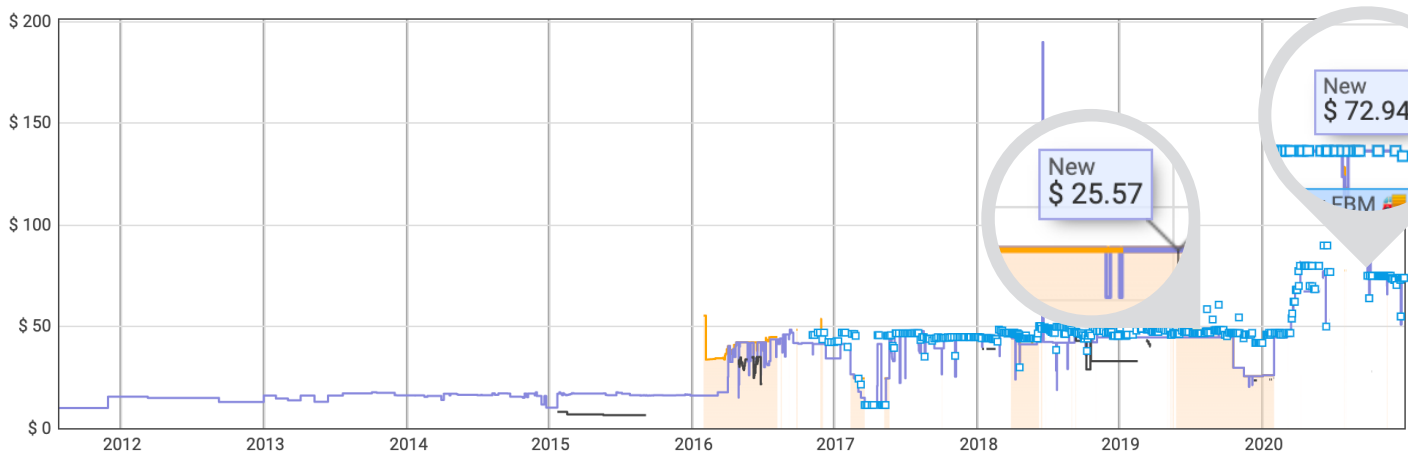
of hand soap prices at least doubled.



GOJO 516103CT FMX-12 Foam Hand Wash, Cranberry, FMX-12 Dispenser, 1250mL Pump (Pack of 3) ★★★★★ 4.4 (56 reviews)
by GOJO Industries, Inc

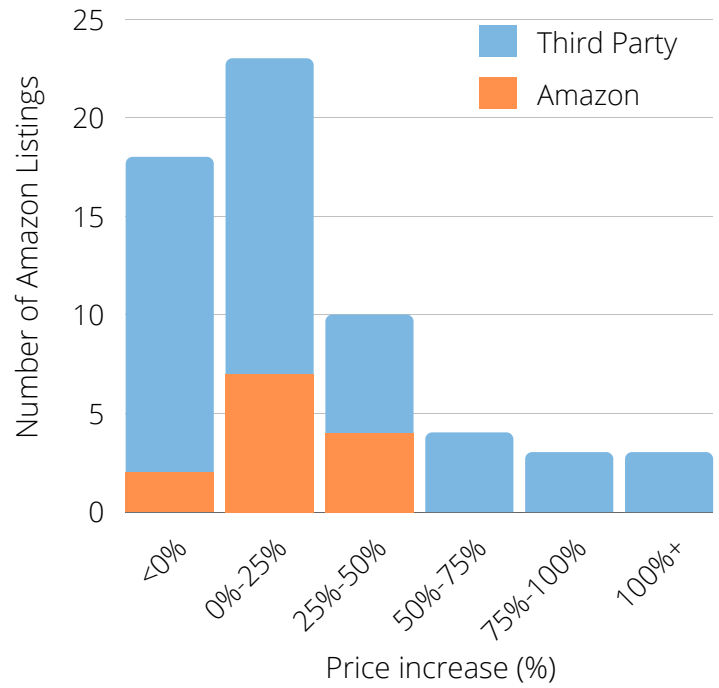
New: **\$ 73.95** (last update: 7 hours ago ↻, last price change: 7 hours ago)

[Amazon Price History](#) [Track product](#) [Data](#) [amazon.com](#) [ebay](#) → [Find related Deals](#)



Cough Syrups

In the past year, 36 percent of the cough syrups increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 5 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 23 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on a cough syrup was \$23.21 -- from \$39.66 to \$62.87 -- for eight 4-ounce bottles. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the price as of Dec. 28.



36%

of cough syrup prices increased by more than 20 percent.

5%

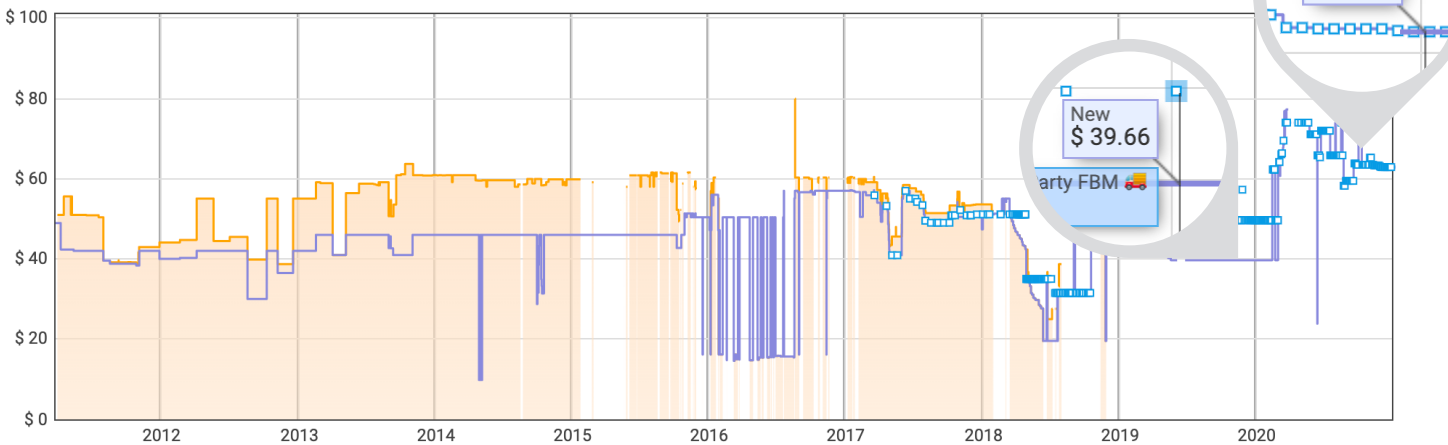
of cough syrup prices at least doubled.



Hyland's Cough Syrup with 100% Natural Honey 4 Kids 4 oz (Pack of 8) ★★★★★ 3.4 (4 reviews)
by Hyland's Homeopathic

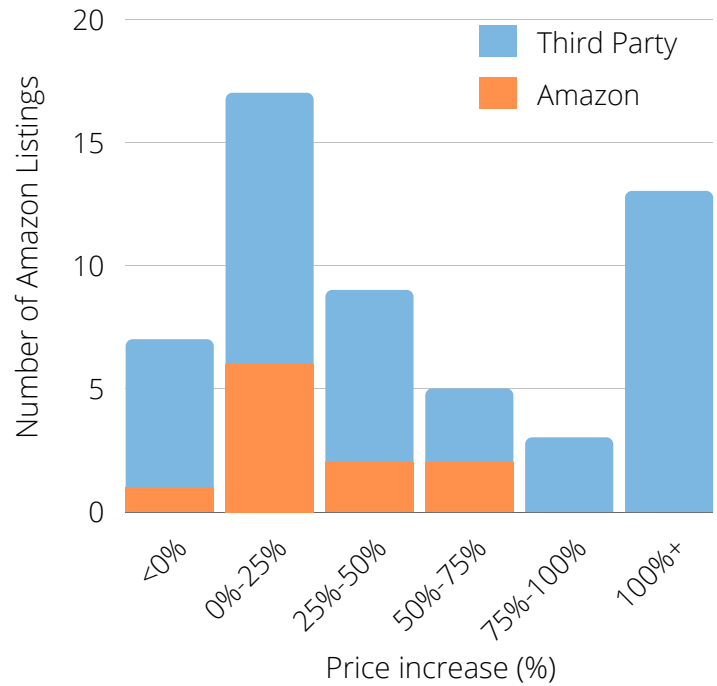
New: **\$ 62.87** (last update: 2 minutes ago, last price change: 2 minutes ago)

Amazon Price History Track product Data amazon.com ebay → Find related Deals



Oral Thermometers

In the past year, 59 percent of the oral thermometers increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 24 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 13 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on oral thermometers was \$146.98 -- from \$254.78 to \$401.76 -- for one electronic thermometer. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



59%

of thermometer prices increased by more than 20 percent.

24%

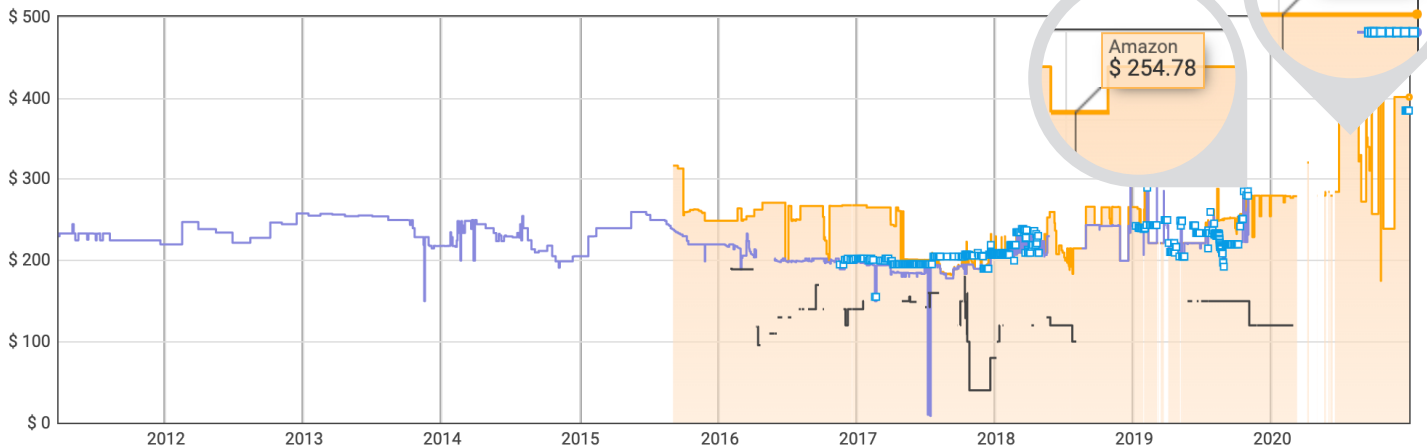
of thermometer prices at least doubled.

Welch Allyn 01690-200 SureTemp Plus Model 690 Electronic Thermometer, Oral Probe with Oral Probe Well ★★★★☆ 4.3

by Welch Allyn - Professional

Amazon: **\$ 401.76** New: **\$ 385.00** (last update: 3 hours ago, last price change: 3 hours ago)

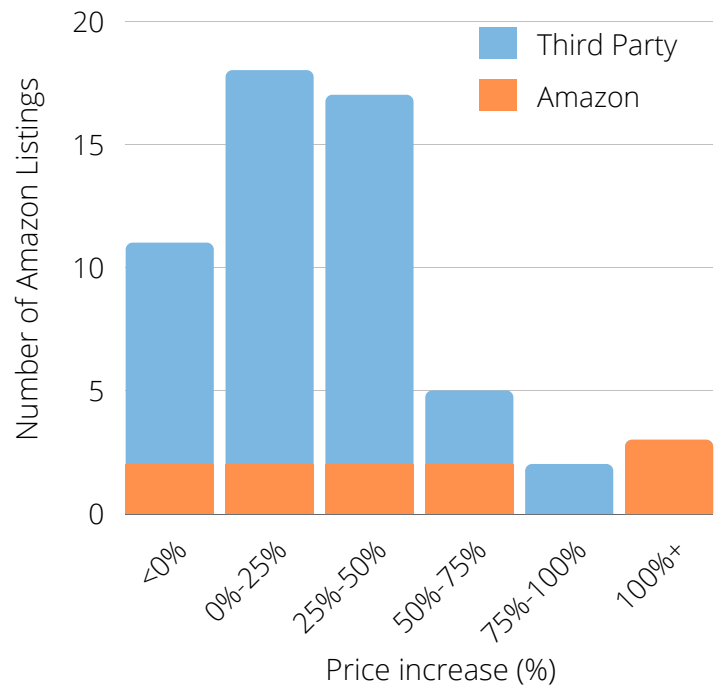
[Amazon Price History](#) [Track product](#) [Data](#) [amazon.com](#) [ebay](#) → [Find related Deals](#)



Pulse Oximeters



In the past year, 54 percent of the pulse oximeters selected increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 5 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 23 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. In one case, the price for one oximeter increased by \$14.45 -- from \$15.50 to \$29.95. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the price as of Dec. 28.



54%

of pulse oximeters prices increased by more than 20 percent.

5%

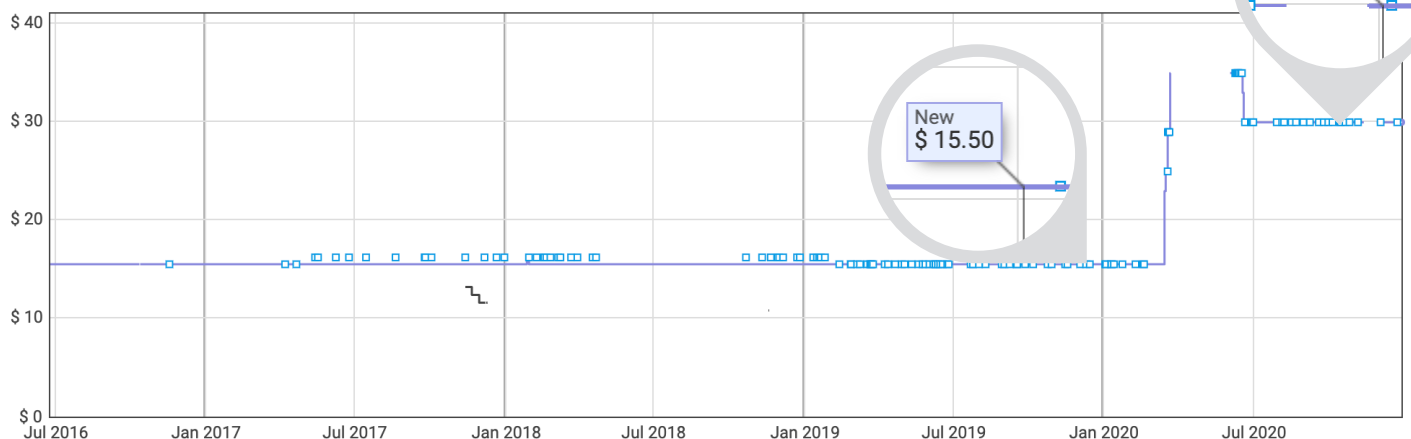
of pulse oximeter prices at least doubled.



ClinicalGuard® CMS-50DL Pulse Oximeter Blood Oxygen SpO2 Sports and Aviation Monitor w/Soft Case Combo Pack, Lar
by ClinicalGuard

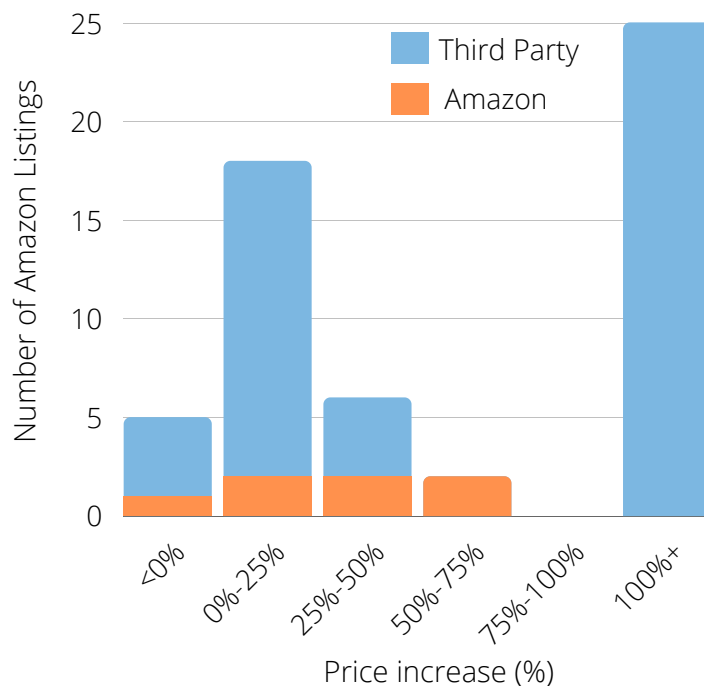
New: **\$ 29.95** (last update: just now, last price change: just now)

Amazon Price History Track product Data amazon.com ebay → Find related Deals



Patio Heaters

In the past year, 61 percent of the patio heaters increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 45 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 12 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on a patio heater was \$549 -- from \$150 to \$699. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.



61%

of patio heater prices increased by more than 20 percent.

45%

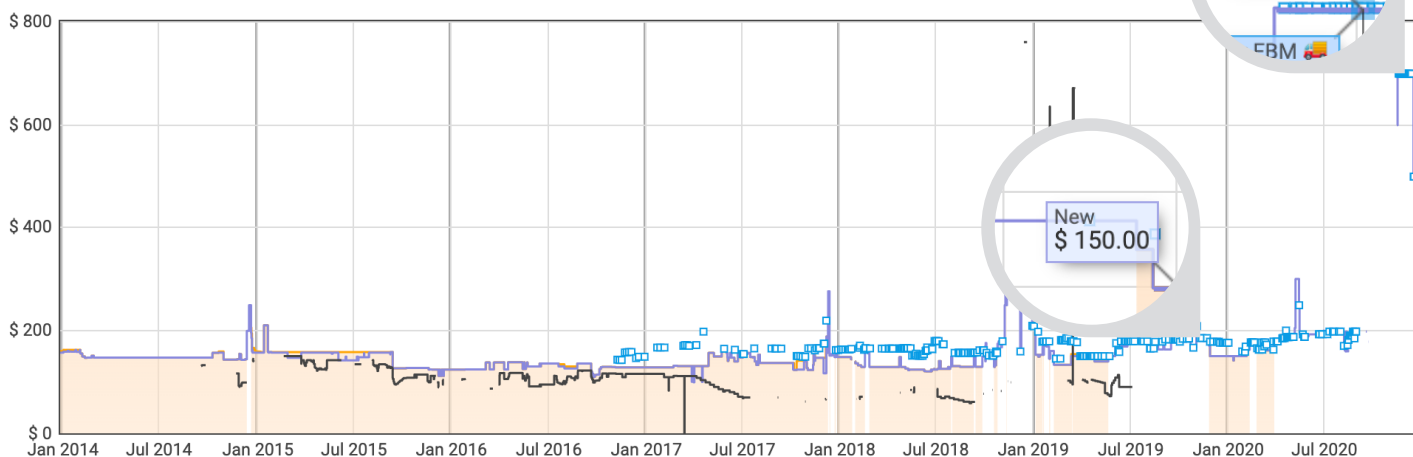
of patio heaters prices at least doubled.

Hiland NG-WSS Tall Natural Gas Patio Heater, 41,000 BTU, 33" Heat Shield, Built In Ground Fixtures, Stainless Steel

by AZ Patio Heaters LLC

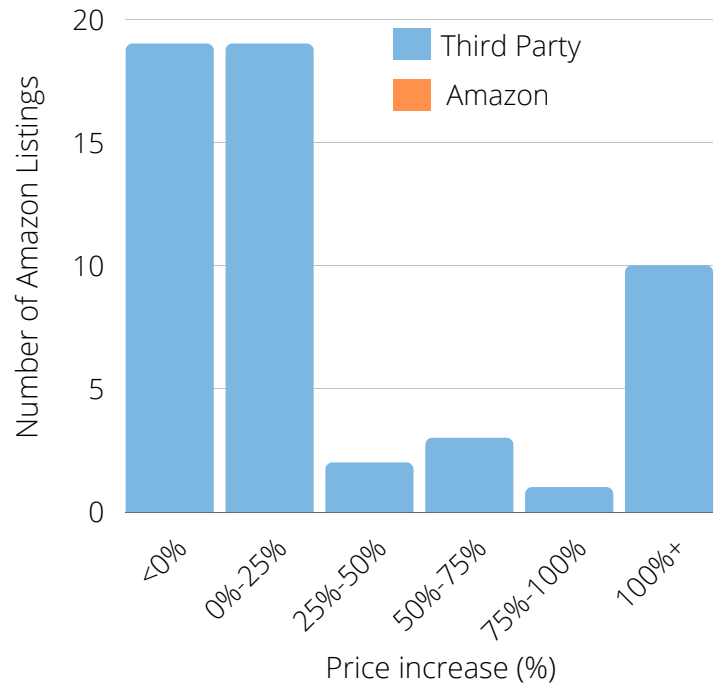
New: **\$ 599.00** eBay New: **\$ 183.77** (last update: just now, last price change: just now)

[Amazon Price History](#) [Track product](#) [Data](#) [Variations](#) [amazon.com](#) [ebay](#) → [Find related Deals](#)



Computer Monitors

In the past year, 30 percent of the computer monitors increased in price by at least 20 percent, and 19 percent at least doubled in price. Amazon directly sold none of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on a used computer monitor was \$4,000.17 -- from \$200 to \$4,200.17 -- for a 23-inch monitor. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years, along with the newest price as of Dec. 28.

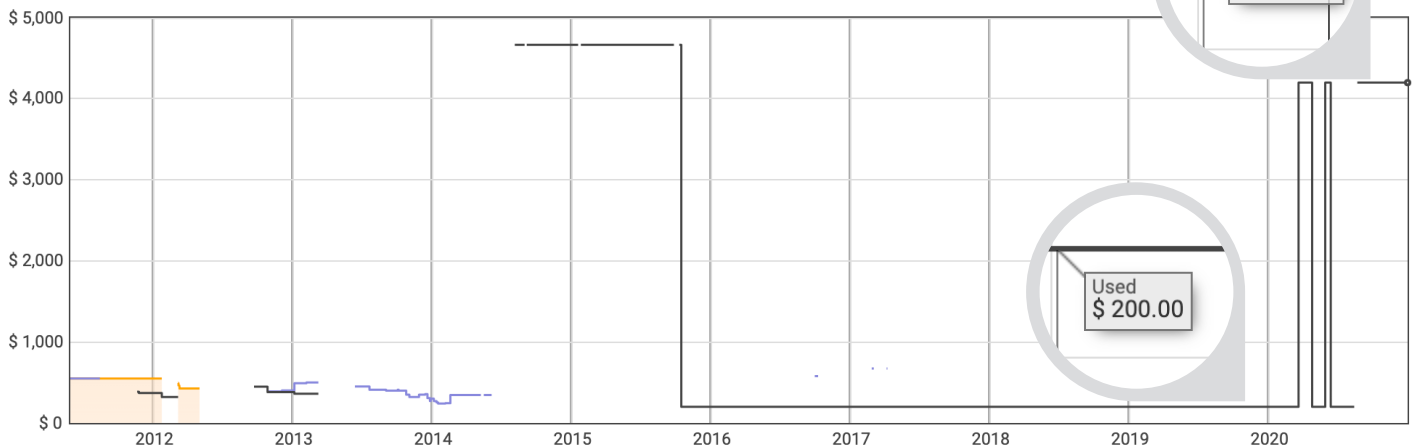


Samsung MD230 23" Monitor (Black)

by Samsung

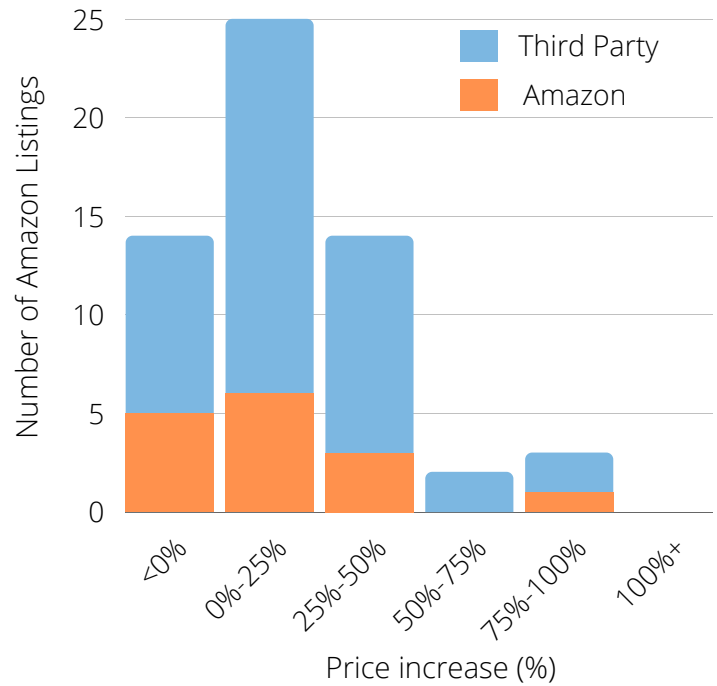
Used: \$ 4,200.17 (last update: just now, last price change: 4 months ago)

Amazon Price History Track product Data amazon.com ebay → Find related Deals



WiFi Mesh Systems

In the past year, 34 percent of the mesh WiFi systems increased in price by at least 20 percent, and none doubled in price. Amazon directly sold 20 percent of the products with price increases of 20 percent or more. Overall, the highest price increase on a mesh WiFi system was \$230.99 -- from \$499 to \$729.99. The graph below shows these price points on Dec. 1 of both years.



34%

of mesh system prices increased by more than 20 percent.

0%

of mesh system prices at least doubled.

Ubiquiti Unifi UAP-Pro3 - Wireless Access Point - 802.11 B/A/G/N (UAPPRO3US)

by Ubiquiti Networks

(last update: 3 hours ago ↻, last price change: 14 days ago)

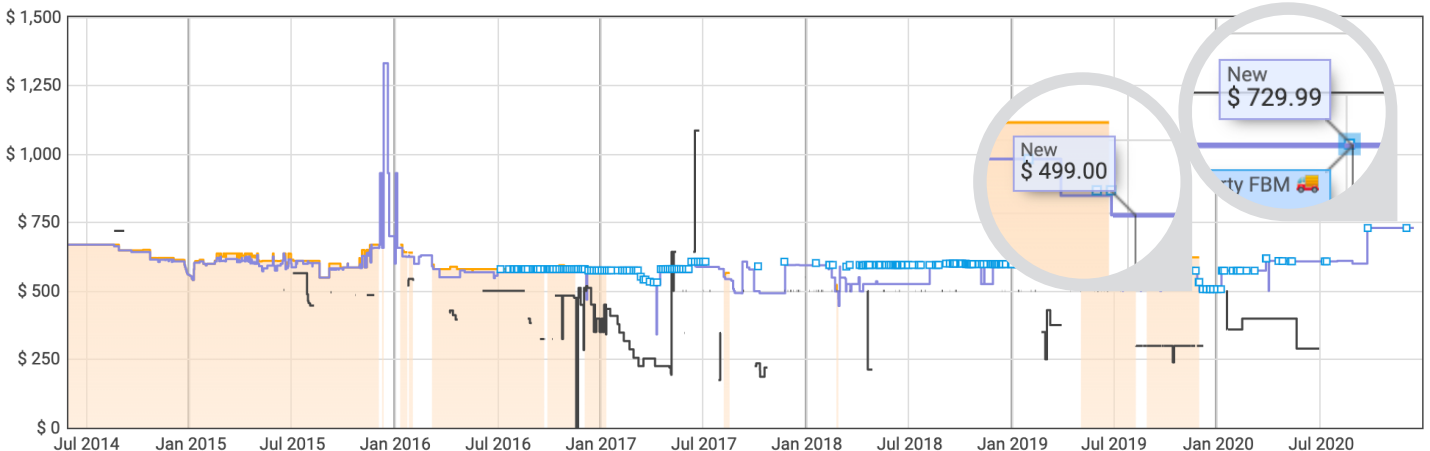
Amazon Price History

Track product

Data

amazon.com ebay

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AMAZON MARKETPLACE FAIR PRICING POLICY

With many consumers avoiding going out to stores since the pandemic hit, they turned to Amazon like never before. Amazon in the second quarter (April through June) reported record sales of \$89 billion, an increase of 40 percent from the same period in 2019. (4) Net sales hit another record in the third quarter (July through September), at \$96 billion, an increase of 37 percent from the same period in 2019. (5) Profits also soared, doubling in the second quarter to \$5.2 billion and tripling in the third quarter, to \$6.3 billion. (6-7)

In its financial report in October, Amazon acknowledged the role of the pandemic. "Higher net sales in the North America and International segments reflect increased demand, particularly as people are staying at home, including for household staples and other essential and home products."

Given its power as a retailer, Amazon must do more to enforce its Marketplace Fair Pricing Policy -- for both third-party sellers and Amazon's own listings. Amazon's policy states:

"If we see pricing practices on a marketplace offer that harms customer trust, Amazon can remove the Buy Box, remove the offer, suspend the ship option, or, in serious or repeated cases, suspending or terminating (sic) selling privileges."

According to this same policy, pricing practices that harm customers include, but are not limited to the following:

"Setting a price on a product or service that is significantly higher than recent prices offered on or off Amazon or selling multiple units of a product for more per unit than that of a single unit of the same product."

This report highlights more than 400 examples of listings that violate Amazon's policy. It's noteworthy that they are Amazon's oldest listings, making it increasingly disappointing that they haven't already sent warnings to these sellers and removed the listings that violate their terms and standards.

In December, we asked Amazon what more could be done to avoid price hikes, in light of the company's efforts to enforce its Marketplace Fair Pricing Policy. We received the following comment.

"We work hard to provide customers with low prices, vast selection, and fast delivery. In fact, during Prime Day alone, customers saved over \$1.4 billion dollars, and this holiday season, analyst firm Profitero found Amazon to be the lowest priced online retailer with prices on average 15% lower than competitors. Our systems are designed to meet the best available price amongst our competitors every day so that customers don't have to."

On the specific question of some unfairly high prices, it continues:

"Sellers set their own product prices in our store. We have a long-standing policy against price gouging, have processes in place to proactively block suspicious offers, and monitor our store 24/7 for violations.

In 2020 alone, we blocked or removed over 39 million offers and suspended more than 13,000 selling accounts for attempted price gouging. We also referred the most egregious offenders to federal and state law enforcement, have worked with more than 40 state attorneys general across the country to prosecute bad actors, and advocated for a federal price gouging standard."

PRIORITY FOR FAIRLY PRICED ITEMS

Consumers shouldn't have to sift through listing after listing to find essentials that are reasonably priced. Amazon should remove listings that violate its own Marketplace Fair Pricing Policy. At the same time, fairly priced essentials and PPE should be prioritized in the first few pages of search results, while listings undergoing internal review by Amazon should be moved to the back of the line, so to speak.

This approach ensures that consumers are seeing fairly priced items first when they search for essentials, and provides tangible disincentives to those sellers who believe they can hike up prices in a pandemic and avoid the consequences.

While supply chain disruptions and other market factors can play a role in minor price increases on high-demand products, we have to draw a line somewhere. Our research throughout the pandemic has revealed massive price spikes on Amazon listings, while prices on the same product from Walmart, Target and others remain largely unchanged. There are too many examples of individual sellers on Amazon hiking prices for certain items, while the manufacturers of the products say they don't condone that behavior. (9) For example, the manufacturer of Wet Ones, whose products are often marked up on Amazon, this year said:

"We are working with Amazon directly to notify them when we see these listings and we advise consumers to notify Amazon and other online retailers directly when they see price gouging." (10)

And finally, data in this report show different trends among multiple companies that sell within the same product category - surgical gloves, disinfectant wipes, etc. Some have significantly increased their prices, yet others have held their prices stable.

A HOPEFUL CASE

As the numbers above indicate, not all product categories showed the same results. In the case of surgical gloves, for example, the product is still in incredibly high demand, and yet the overwhelming majority of sellers kept their prices down or even lowered them in the last year. Those are the numbers we should see for all essential products when sellers put consumers first.

DEMAND FOR PRICE GOUGING LAWS

In the United States, 37 states, three territories and Washington DC currently have laws that help authorities combat price gouging during national or state emergencies. While the specifics of these laws vary by state, many take effect when the state declares an emergency. In light of the pandemic, 56 U.S. states and territories currently have issued a public health or state emergency. (11)

It's a victory to see states across the country stepping up and strengthening these consumer protections. Colorado's anti-price-gouging legislation took effect in July. There's a push for temporary orders, as exist in Maryland, for example, to become law.

Other states go further. Montana, for example, declared back in March that price gouging is prohibited under the state's Consumer Protection Act. However, there's no law specifically aimed at price gouging.

Now, in addition to calling for price gouging legislation in all remaining states, we must also pass comprehensive federal price gouging legislation that goes beyond preventing hoarding, as was prohibited in March by a presidential order. (13) Strong federal legislation will bolster current state laws and help less powerful entities take on giants such as Amazon when necessary.

A MESSAGE TO SHOPPERS

This pandemic has brought along difficulties and roadblocks that we couldn't have predicted. Trying to do so much shopping online during a global pandemic can feel like you're caught in a constant tug-of-war between convenience, affordability and safety. It's incredibly important that consumers continue to avoid stockpiling essentials, report cases of price gouging when they arise and shop around to find the best prices on the products they need - - whether that's in stores or across multiple websites. Finally, watch here for a step-by-step tutorial on how to use Keepa to determine whether you're getting a good deal.

METHODOLOGY

This report exclusively pulled data using Keepa -- a price tracking tool with detailed price charts of over 1 billion Amazon products. (14) Keepa's "Category Tree" function helped narrow down Amazon's huge range of listings to one category at a time, such as "disinfectant wipes," "facial tissues," "oral thermometers," etc. After selecting a category, each data set was sorted again using the "Tracking Since" filter, which arranged the listings from oldest to newest. By choosing only the oldest listings, we guaranteed that the products had been listed by their sellers for at least a year.

Because there were many cases of incorrectly labeled products slipping into each category pool, all listings were reviewed individually to confirm that they matched the search criteria. For example, listings for spare bulbs were excluded from searches for patio heaters. The computer monitor category does contain listings for used products.

Finally, each listing was reviewed one-by-one, gathering the Dec. 1, 2019, and Dec. 1, 2020, price points for each. We then calculated the percent increase from these data points for each product. It's important to note that certain price fluctuations are expected, and that price changes may be lower or higher based on the specific price on Dec. 1 of each year.

Not all increases or decreases in prices are attributable to the presence or absence of price gouging. Any listings that were not for sale or were out of stock on either Dec. 1 of this year or last year were skipped to maintain fairness.

NOTES

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12. States with no price-gouging laws are: Arizona, Delaware, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington and Wyoming.

13. "50 U.S. Code § 4512 - Hoarding of Designated Scarce Materials." Legal Information Institute, Legal Information Institute,
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