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## Covid flip-flop: 'Chappal' sales up, formals down

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Whether it's an exasperated middle-class mom brandishing it as a weapon of mass discipline during the lockdown or a villager walking to his farm, the humble 'chappal' is paving the way for the footwear industry to make a comeback.

At a time when formal footwear has taken a step back as most people are working from home, sales of flip flops, sandals and slides have touched 80% of pre-Covid levels, said retailers, manufacturers in India. Despite some people taking up fitness for the first time, sports shoes are still huffing and puffing to catch up.

"Our sports shoes sales are still 25% of pre-Covid levels as colleges and schools remain shut," said Ramesh Kumar Dua, MD, Relaxo Footwear, which sells brands like Flite, Sparx and Schoolmate. "Flip flops, on the other hand, have done extremely well, especially in rural India, as those areas were not much im-

pacted by Covid-19. All our factories manufacturing open toe footwear are currently operating at full capacity."

"There has been a change in the requirement point of view from consumers due to the pandemic," said Sandeep Kataria, Bata India CEO.

► Below ₹500, P 15

### '80% of footwears sold in India are below Rs 500'

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Around 80% of all footwear sold in India is below the Rs 500 price point," added the CEO of India's largest footwear retailer.

Despite its modest image, flip flops, however, have undergone a glamorous makeover, with pairs costing upwards of Rs 5,000 being sold out from online sites during the lockdown.

"In the fashion category, open footwear has seen one of strongest traction," said Abhishek Ganguly, GM, Puma India and Southeast Asia. "Slides that are trendy and comfortable, have become a rage among the youth during these times."

Similarly, Metro Brands, which operates over 500 stores across India, saw a majority of its sales coming from open toe footwear. "From only 20% during pre-Covid months, in womenswear, 40% of our online sales currently comes from sandals, while for men, it's 50 to 60%," said Alisha Malik, VP, e-commerce and marketing at Metro Brands.

"There is not much sales in party wear happening and even in formal footwear, we have seen a lowering of basic price points. But when it comes to open toe footwear, it's just not the basics that consumers are buying. There is a bit of bling and shine in the pairs they are opting for," she said.