**Coronavirus: Will Covid-19 speed up the use of robots to replace human workers?**

By Zoe Thomas

Technology reporter

For better or worse the robots are going to replace many humans in their jobs, analysts say, and the coronavirus outbreak is speeding up the process.

"People usually say they want a human element to their interactions but Covid-19 has changed that," says Martin Ford, who has written about the ways robots will be integrated into the economy in the coming decades.

"[Covid-19] is going to change consumer preference and really open up new opportunities for automation."

Companies large and small are expanding how they use robots to increase social distancing and reduce the number of staff that have to physically come to work. Robots are also being used to perform roles workers cannot do at home.

Walmart, America's biggest retailer, is using robots to scrub its floors.

Robots in South Korea have been used to measure temperatures and distribute hand sanitiser.

With health experts warning some social distancing measures may need to be in place through 2021, robot workers may be in greater demand.

UVD Robots, the Danish manufacture of ultraviolet-light-disinfection robots, shipped hundreds of its machines to hospitals in China and Europe.

Groceries and restaurants offering takeaway are using these machines more too.

Experts say as more businesses re-open we can expect to see further adoption of this technology - you may see robots cleaning your schools or offices.

"Customers now care more about their safety and the safety and health of workers," says Blake Morgan, author of The Customer of the Future.

"Moves towards automation can keep them all healthier and customers will reward companies that do this."

There are still limitations. Ms Morgan points out that automated checkouts at groceries should reduce human interactions but because many systems don't work well or break easily customers avoid them and go to human cashiers instead.