



## **Tip Sheet: Safety Information Regarding Voluntary Use of N95 Respirators**

**November 10, 2020**

The following Tip sheet was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health for use by the general public who will voluntarily be using an N95 respirator and will be posted at <http://www.sfdcp.org/ppe>. This Tip sheet may change as information is updated.

**AUDIENCE:** Non-healthcare individuals who are voluntarily using N95 respirators for additional protection from COVID-19. This tip sheet does not apply to individuals, employers, or employees that are mandated to use fit-tested N95 respirators either by CalOSHA regulations or local Health Officer Orders.

**BACKGROUND:** Properly fitted N95 respirators (sometimes called N95 masks or N95s) offer additional protection from the COVID-19 virus which can get past other types of face coverings. Some individuals may want to consider using an N95 respirator for extra protection especially:

- Individuals who are at higher risk of severe illness if they get COVID-19 (see [Who is at higher risk?](#))
- Individuals who must be in higher risk situations like being indoors around people who are unmasked (such as in restaurants or public/shared transit) – see [What can I do to protect myself if I am at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 or at higher risk of getting exposed to COVID-19?](#)

### **Important Safety Information Regarding N95 Respirators**

#### **Safety**

- N95 respirators may not be helpful for all people and may be dangerous for some people with lung or heart conditions. Before wearing an N95 respirator, consult with your personal health care provider regarding **any** health conditions.
- It takes more effort to breathe through a respirator. Monitor yourself and take breaks, particularly if you're working in the heat or doing heavy work.
- N95 respirators only filter out particulates. They do not protect you against gases and vapors, including cleaning solvents, vehicle exhaust, or gasoline. Do not use an N95 respirator to enter a closed space such as a tank, underground vault, or manhole.

#### **Proper Use**

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol before putting on or taking off your respirator. Avoid touching your respirator while using it.
- To get protection from an N95 respirator there must be a good seal around the face.
  - Some employers may offer fit-testing which is a process that helps identify the exact brand, model, and size of N95 respirator that will ensure a good seal. If individuals fail fit testing for a specific brand, model, and size of N95 respirators, employers can attempt to fit these employees with alternate brands and models of N95 respirators. It is not uncommon for employers to need 2-3 brands and models of N95 respirators and 2-3 sizes of N95 respirators to successfully fit 95% of their workforce if that is the goal.



- If you are unable to access fit-testing, see Step 4 of the attached visual flier on how to use an N95 respirator and assess for fit.
- Facial hair, including stubble, which intrudes into the sealing surfaces will cause the respirator to leak, negating protection. If you have a beard you will need to shave it.
- Do not wear the respirator's straps over a hat, hood, cap, or hair cover. Straps should be against your head.
- Follow all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use and maintenance of the respirator.
- Discard your respirator:
  - When it becomes difficult to breathe through it,
  - When the inside shows any indications (smudging, spotting, discoloration) of contamination,
  - When the outside becomes dirty, or
  - When the facepiece is torn, distorted or a strap is broken.
- If you are reusing your respirator, make sure to store it in a clean location where it will not be crushed or damaged. Paper rather than plastic bags are preferred for storage because it allows the respirator to dry. Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator (e.g. label bag with your name).

### **Other Information**

- Do not use respirators with valves as these allow droplets to be released from the respirator which puts those around you at risk. Respirators with valves are not allowed by [Health Order No. C19-12c](#).
- Employers who provide respirators or permit employees to use respirators should follow [California Code of Regulations \(CCR\) Title 8 Section 5144 \(c\)\(2\)](#) and [Appendix D](#) requirements for voluntary use of respirators.

## **Additional Resources**

More information on Personal Protective Equipment: [www.sfgdcp.org/ppe](http://www.sfgdcp.org/ppe)

Department of Public Health COVID-19 guidance: [www.sfgdcp.org/covid19](http://www.sfgdcp.org/covid19)

# Voluntary N95 Respirator Use

**Target Audience:** non-healthcare employees who are voluntarily using N95 respirators for additional protection from COVID-19 when working in higher risk settings. Following these simple steps will help you properly put on and take off your N95 respirator, and keep you and everyone else safe.

## 1 Wash Your Hands



Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs containing at least 60% alcohol.

## 2 Inspect the Respirator



Inspect the respirator for damage. If it appears damaged or damp, do not use it.

## 3 Put on the Respirator



Cup the respirator in your hand with the nose piece at your fingertips and the straps hanging below your hand.



Cover your mouth and nose with the respirator and make sure there are no gaps (e.g., facial hair, hair, and glasses) between your face and the respirator.



Place the strap over your head and rest at the top back of your head. If you have a second strap, place the bottom strap around your neck and below your ears. Do not overlap straps.



If your respirator has a metal nose clip, use your fingertips from both hands to mold the nose area to the shape of your nose.

## 4 Adjust the Respirator



Place both hands over the respirator. Inhale quickly and then exhale. If you feel leakage from the nose, readjust the nose piece; if leakage from the respirator edges, readjust the straps. Repeat until you get a proper seal. If you can't get a proper seal, try another respirator.



Avoid touching the respirator while using it. **If you do, wash your hands.**

## 5 Wear the Respirator

*Note: If you reuse your respirator, wear gloves when inspecting and putting on the respirator. Avoid touching your face (including your eyes, nose, and mouth) during the process.*

## 6 Remove the Respirator



Wash your hands.



Remove the respirator from behind. Do not touch the front.

## 7 Dispose of the Respirator



If the respirator does not need to be reused because of supply shortages, discard it in a closed-bin waste receptacle. Wash your hands.

*For more information, see the quick video, "Putting On and Taking Off a Mask".*



Note: Images shown represent one type of N95 respirator. Yours may look different - the NIOSH N95 Database has all the specific instructions for each type.

- 1) Find the respirator certification number (TC-84A-####) on respirator face-piece or strap.
- 2) Look up the respirator manufacturer on the NIOSH N95 database [https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp\\_part/default.html](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp_part/default.html)
- 3) A link to the respirator's instructions will be in the right-hand column.

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