FACT SHEET | PROTECTING OURSELVES AND OTHERS WITH RESPIRATORS AND MASKS

MIGRANT CLINICIANS NETWORK

We can protect ourselves and others by using respirators to help prevent the spread of infectious diseases like the flu, COVID-19, and other illnesses. This protective equipment is also helpful during and after disasters like flooding and wildfires to prevent our exposure to mold and smoke. Sometimes, when we are not able to get respirators, we can combine the use of disposable facemasks with other prevention strategies to protect ourselves. This fact sheet provides a quick reference on masks and respirators, the most appropriate ways to use them, and information that's important to consider about when to use them.

Types of masks or respirators

When choosing respiratory protection, you should use protection that best suits your level of risk. You may need to consider cost and activity, but the priority is to keep yourself protected for as long as you need protection.

Remember: In some cases, your work may require that you use a specific type of respirator.

Disposable Mask

Limited filtration

Manufacturing is not regulated.

It is thrown out after one use.

Medical Mask

Medium filtration

Manufacturing based on ASTM standards.

Example: Surgical Mask.

It is thrown out after one use.

Respirator

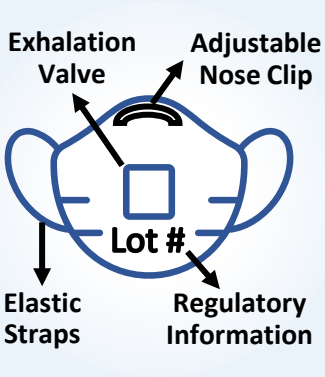
(NIOSH Certified and Non-Certified)

High filtration

Example:
Disposable KN95 or N95.

OSHA requires employers to provide a new one each day in settings where a respirator is required. For personal use (for example when shopping), careful reuse is possible.

RESPIRATOR AND MASK PARTS



All respirators and masks should have elastic or adjustable straps and an adjustable nose clip. Some respirators may have exhalation valves.

Respirators also have regulatory information on the front that includes the number indicating efficiency (N95, N99, N100, R95, R99, R100, P95, P99, P100), lot number, approval number (starts with the letters TC) and the letters "NIOSH" on NIOSH-approved respirators.

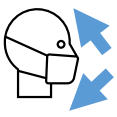
When your workplace requires you to use a respirator, you must be fitted. If it is not required in your workplace, you can use a respirator without being fitted.

Medical masks are not individually labeled but come in boxes with quality control, performance, and safety standard identification information called ASTM (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3).

MASK USE IN FIVE STEPS: Inspection, Donning, Use, Removal, and Storage.

1 Inspect your mask and verify that it is not torn, stretched or dirty.

2 Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water. Hold the mask by the straps and place it over the nose and mouth.



3 Always keep the mask on your nose and mouth. Avoid touching it and remove it completely when eating or drinking.

4 Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water. Hold the mask by the straps and remove it.

5 Single-use masks must be discarded. Cloth masks should be washed with soap and water and dried. Respirators can be reused by storing them in paper bags and alternating them with others.

When is it safe to stop wearing respiratory protection?

We have made lots of progress since the start of COVID-19. Vaccines are our best source of protection. But masks and respirators are still needed to protect ourselves and others. Assessing our exposure risk can help us decide whether to use a mask or a respirator. When assessing your risk think about the following questions, if you find yourself in the Medium- or High-risk scenarios you should wear your facial protection.

Individual Factors	Low Risk	Medium Risk	High Risk
Are you vaccinated against COVID-19? How long ago was your vaccination?	Recently vaccinated with the updated vaccine	My vaccine is out of date	I haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19
Do you have any chronic diseases (like heart conditions, diabetes, and obesity) or respiratory conditions (like asthma) that might increase your risk of severe infection? Are you immunocompromised?	• I don't suffer from chronic diseases or respiratory conditions • No, I am not immunocompromised		• Yes, I have a chronic/respiratory condition • Yes, I am immunocompromised
How old are you? The older you are, the greater the risk.			I am 65 years old or older
Community Factors			
Do you know your community transmission level?*	COVID Test Positivity **Low** (9.9% or less)	COVID Test Positivity **Medium** (10% to 19%)	COVID Test Positivity **High** (More than 20%)
Type of exposure			
Will your exposure be indoors or outdoors?**	My exposure will be outdoors or in a well-ventilated space		My exposure will be indoors or in a poorly ventilated space
How long will the duration of the exposure be?	Less than 15 minutes (Example: Running an errand)		More than 15 minutes (Example: During my 8-hour workday)
Will the event or place be crowded?	You are at least 6ft away from other individuals		You cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance between you and other individuals

*See the CDC's website for community transmission levels: covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps_positivity-week
**For more information, see MCN's resource "Ventilation as an Essential Control Strategy": https://bit.ly/3M68pjt

Resource updated: 10/13/23

This publication was supported by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number U45ES006179. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.