

# Covid-19 Respirator Selection Information Sheet



The Center for Disease Control now know from recent studies that a significant portion of individuals with Covid-19 lack symptoms and that even those who eventually develop symptoms can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms. The CDC has recently begun to advise to the general public, the use of simple cloth face coverings, to slow the spread of the virus by preventing people who may have the virus from transmitting it to others.

For construction, proper hygiene practices are still the best practice to be used. Employers should try to plan the job so that tasks can be performed while maintaining personal distances of 2 meters between workers. Hand-washing and disinfecting of machinery, vehicles and tools is still one of the best infection control measures on the jobsite.

## What is the difference between a mask and a respirator?

The biggest difference between the two is that masks are meant to protect those around the wearer from droplets from the wearer's body. They are NOT meant to protect the wearer. Respirators on the other hand are made to protect the wearer. Further, respirators are effective against much smaller particles. In either case, you are only protected if you wear your mask or respirator correctly, so make sure it fits snugly and take it off carefully. Always avoid contact with your eyes, nose and mouth while taking a mask off. Wash your hands immediately afterwards.

## Surgical/Medical Masks

They protect from the transfer of micro-organisms, body fluids and large particles. Unlike N95 respirators, masks are looser in fit. As a result, they do not provide the same level of filtration. This type of mask is effective in blocking large drops and particles from the mouth and nose of the wearer, which can avoid virus infection to others. The use of this mask must also be correct, must cover the entire area of the nose and chin. It is meant for only one use and should not be worn for long periods.



## Non-medical Face Coverings

Non-medical face coverings include reusable cloth masks, bandanas and scarves, and used in the same way as a surgical or medical mask, to protect others against large particles and respiratory droplets. However, this kind of protective covering must be cleaned between uses.

## Dust Mask

Dust masks are disposable filtering facepieces. They can be worn for comfort against non-toxic nuisance dusts during activities like mowing, sweeping and dusting. These masks are not NIOSH approved and do not offer protection against hazardous dusts, gases or vapors.



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## Air-Purifying Respirators

Air-purifying respirators can remove contaminants in the air that you breathe by filtering out particulates (e.g., dusts, metal fumes, mists, etc.). They are tight-fitting and are available in several forms:

- quarter-mask (covering the nose and mouth)
- half-face mask (covering the face from the nose to below the chin)
- full facepiece (covering the face from above the eyes to below the chin)

Respirators are tested and approved by NIOSH or CSA for worker safety. The number in a rating tells you the minimum amount of airborne particles the mask protects against

Example: An N95 mask keeps out at least 95% of particles but isn't oil resistant, and a P100 mask is oil proof while protecting the wearer from at least 99.8% of particles.

## Common Types of Respirators

### N95 Respirators

N95 respirators achieve a minimum filtration efficiency of 95% when worn properly. The edges of the mask form a seal around the nose and mouth. N95 respirators are designed to reduce the risk of inhaling hazardous airborne particles and aerosols.



If using the N95 mask properly, the nose and mouth will be tightly closed so that no air gaps enter. The use of this mask must be replaced immediately if the mask is damaged, wet, or dirty. The mask can be worn for up to 8 hours, but can only be used once.

### P100/N100 Respirators

P100 respirators are effective at blocking 99.97 percent of oil-based particulates when properly worn. They can protect wearers from exposure to dust, fumes and hazardous mists. They also provide complete protection against non-oil-based particulates.



N100 masks are designed to protect the wearer from inhaling non-oil-based particulates. They're ideal for grinding, sanding, and other activities that do not involve oil-based hazards.

The Centers for Disease Control tested N100 and P100 masks for their effectiveness against avian flu, swine flu and other contagious diseases and found them to provide superior protection. These are meant for longer use according to the manufacturer.

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## When should respirators be used?

For construction projects there may be some confusion as to when to wear respiratory protection. You should always assess the hazards prior to doing the task to determine what infection control is best. Personal distance between workers is still the best control measure available for infection prevention.

Respiratory protection is required when workers cannot maintain personal distance such as when doing a heavy lift. Because there is a short supply of respirators, you should review what type of respiratory protection is available to you in your workplace. NIOSH approved respirators are the best type of respiratory protection to use.

Before the proper respiratory protection can be selected for a job, be sure you have already asked these questions:

- have you evaluated the hazard?
- can you do the job in a different way that will allow you to maintain personal distancing?
- have you considered whether engineering controls are feasible?

When selecting respirators as part of hazard control, an employer should also consider the following:

- exposure assessment
- respirator selection
- respirator fit-testing
- training for the worker
- inspection and record keeping
- cleaning and sanitizing respirators
- maintaining respirators
- proper storage of respirators
- safe operating procedures

Workers with beards, long sideburns, or even a two-day stubble may not wear respirators because the hair breaks the seal between the skin and the respirator mask. This break means that the respirator mask will "leak" and will not provide the needed protection. Also, if a worker has facial scars or an acne problem, the facial skin may not be able to form a good seal with a respirator mask.

**Resource:** Center for Disease Control & CCOHS

## Contact Information

**Office Location:** 1939 Elphinstone St. Regina, SK

**Telephone:** 306-585-3060 **Email:** info@hcsas.sk.ca **Website:** hcsas.sk.ca