

# TOOLBOX TALK - RESPIRATOR USAGE DURING COVID-19

Employers who continue operations are required to maintain coronavirus prevention practices consistent with DOSH, OSHA and Department of Health guidance. Coronavirus is recognized as a very serious workplace hazard.

## Mandatory Social Distancing

Employers must ensure all employees keep at least six feet away from coworkers and the public, when feasible. Other prevention measures are required such as use of barriers to block sneezes and coughs or improve ventilation when social distancing is not feasible.

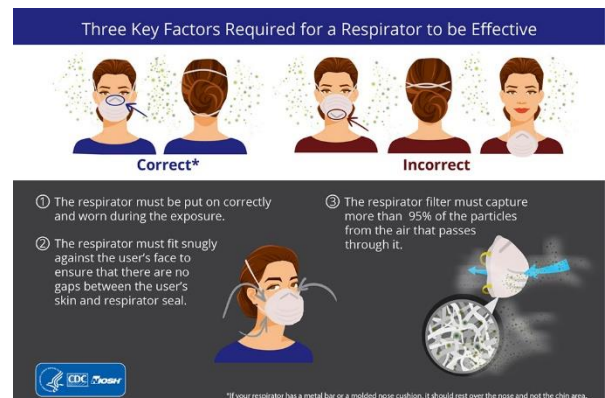
**Only infrequent, intermittent passing within 6 feet is allowed between employees without wearing respiratory protection.**

Employers should assess their engineering controls, work practices, and administrative controls on an ongoing basis to identify any changes they can make to decrease the need for M95s or other FFRs (Filtering facepiece respirators).

## When Mandatory Social Distancing is Not Feasible

Some industries may have challenges with basic elements so one or more of the following alternatives may be used to provide protection for workers.

- Face shields can prevent direct exposure to sneezes or coughs; they also provide protection from cleaning chemicals and disinfectants. Please note DOSH is also promoting the use of a face shield as an alternate means of protection.
- Respirators are not normally recommended for social distancing purposes but may be appropriate where workers must be near others. Employers must establish a Respiratory Protection Program per the Respirators Rule (Chapter 296-842 WAC) to ensure proper use and care when respirators are necessary.
- Surgical face masks (loose fitting cloth covers over the mouth and nose) do not prevent respiration of fine aerosols and are not protective within close proximity. The primary purpose for these devices is to prevent exposures to others and may have a use when individuals enter the workplace with a cough or sneeze.
- Workers should not touch their mouth, nose, eyes, and nearby surfaces when putting on, using, and removing PPE and masks.



**Respirator Requirements:** Employees must be medically cleared, trained, and respirator fit tested prior to respirator use. Employees who are required to use respirators must also complete the training and fit testing requirements on an annual basis. However, compliance officers have been ordered to use discretion during the COVID-19 outbreak.

### Respirator Basics:

- Respirators must always be inspected prior to donning.
- The inspection should check for missing or worn respirator parts.
- For air-purifying respirators, the proper cartridge or filter must be selected based on the hazard.
- Respirator users must don the respirator properly and verify a good fit by performing positive and negative user seal checks each time the respirator is donned.
- Respirator users must know the limitations of their respirator and stay clean shaven in the respirator seal area.
- Employees may not share respirators and must only use the respirator for which they have been fitted for.
- Respirators must be cleaned and stored properly after each use. Perform initial fit tests for each employee with the same model, style, and size respirator that the worker will be required to wear for protection against COVID-19 (initial fit testing is essential to determine if the respirator properly fits the worker and is capable of providing the expected level of protection).
- Inform workers that the employer is suspending the annual fit testing of N95 filtering facepiece respirators to preserve and prioritize the supply of respirators for use in situations where they are required to be worn.
- Explain to workers the importance of performing a user seal check (i.e., a fit check) at each donning to make sure they are getting an adequate seal from their respirator. User Seal Check Procedures.
- Conduct a fit test if they observe visual changes in the employee's physical condition that could affect respirator fit (e.g., facial scarring, dental changes, cosmetic surgery, or obvious changes in body weight) and explain to workers that, if their face shape has changed since their last fit test, they may no longer be getting a good facial seal with the respirator and, thus, are not being adequately protected.
- Remind workers that they should inform their supervisor if the integrity and/or fit of their N95 filtering facepiece respirator (FFR) is compromised.

