

FAQs: Respiratory Protection and Fit Testing

Environmental Health and Safety often receives questions about respiratory protection. Here is a summary of frequently asked questions.

What is a respirator?

A respirator is a protective facepiece, hood or helmet that is designed to protect the wearer against a variety of harmful airborne agents. The N-95 respirator is the most commonly used respirator at EVMS and is used for protection against influenza and other respiratory diseases.

When is the use of respirators required?

OSHA's respirator standard, 29 CFR 1910.134, requires the use of respirators to protect employees from breathing contaminated and/or oxygen-deficient air when effective engineering controls are not feasible, or while they are being instituted. The N-95 respirator is the most commonly used respirator at EVMS and is used for protection against TB.

Can any respirator be used?

No, respirators should be selected based on hazards to which the worker is exposed.

How is the proper respirator size determined?

Proper respirator size is determined through a fit test. Employees using negative or positive pressure tight-fitting facepiece respirators must pass an appropriate fit test using the procedures detailed in OSHA's respirator standard. To schedule an appointment for a fit test at EVMS please call 446-7928.

When is respirator fit testing required?

Fit testing is required prior to initial use, whenever a different respirator facepiece is used, and at least annually thereafter. An additional fit test is required whenever there are changes in the user's physical features that could affect respirator fit (facial scarring, dental changes, cosmetic surgery, or an obvious change in body weight). The employee must be fit tested with the same make, model, style and size of respirator that will be used. **As of January 1, 2008 persons working in healthcare facilities who wear N-95 respirators for protection against TB will be required to be fit tested annually.** This is a change in regulation from the past three years.



Must employees see a doctor before they use a respirator?

The employer must provide a medical evaluation to determine the employee's ability to use a respirator before the employee is fit tested or required to use the respirator in the workplace. This medical evaluation must be performed by a physician or other licensed health care professional using the medical questionnaire found in Appendix C of 29 CFR 1910.134 or an initial medical examination that obtains the same information.

Can a respirator be used by more than one person?

Full face and half face cartridge respirators may be shared but must be thoroughly disinfected after each use before being worn by a different person. Disposable respirators such as the N-95 cannot be disinfected and therefore may not be shared. Recommended cleaning procedures are often supplied by the manufacturer or one may use the procedures detailed in Appendix B-2 of 29 CFR 1910.134.

If you have any other questions or concerns contact Kristi Olivar at 446-7928 or olivarkl@evms.edu.