



Public Health

A Guide to Using N95 Masks

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N95 Masks

N95 masks are commonly called “particulate respirators”. “N” means ‘Not resistant to oil’, “95” refers to a 95% filter efficiency. They offer protection by filtering the air before it enters the respiratory tract. N95 masks are designed to filter 95% of particles (particulate aerosols free of oil) that are 0.3 microns in size or larger. They effectively provide protection from airborne contaminants and pathogens such as tuberculosis, chickenpox, and measles.

Mask Selection

Masks should be used whenever there is a risk of exposure to airborne pathogens that may be inhaled. N95 masks are effective in filtering out particles that (1) can remain suspended in the air for extended periods of time and (2) that can be transmitted by the airborne route (<5 microns in size), particles such as tuberculosis, chickenpox, and measles. N95 masks meet and exceed the criteria for use with TB patients.

Note: Currently, N95 masks are not recommended for use in the event of an influenza pandemic. The latest evidence indicates that surgical masks offer adequate protection against influenza viruses.

Surgical masks can be used as a protective device for pathogens that can be transmitted by droplets (>5 microns) and that do not remain suspended in the air such as influenza, mumps, pertussis, and N. meningitidis. However, a surgical mask does not provide adequate respiratory protection to health care workers who are exposed to airborne pathogens.

Mask Use

An N95 mask must be fit tested and worn according to the manufacturer’s specification to ensure that an effective seal and maximum benefits are achieved. A tight facial fit is required in order to provide the best protection; this requires men to be clean shaven.

To ensure a proper seal, masks should be fit-checked each time they are put on.

Always ensure that the mask is maintained in proper position. Do not pull the mask away from the face to readjust it. Leave the contaminated area and follow recommendations for removing a mask.

Donning an N95 Mask

1. Select the N95 mask that you were fit tested for. Inspect the mask to ensure that it is not damaged.
2. Place mask over nose, mouth and chin. Ensure that the bottom flap is pulled out completely.
3. Secure the lower elastic at the top of your neck and the upper elastic above your ears, at the back/top of the head.
4. Adjust for a comfortable fit.
5. Place fingertips of both hands on each side of the metal nosepiece. Beginning at the bridge of the nose, work your way down the cheeks molding the flexible nosepiece to create a snug fit. Pinching the nosepiece using one hand may result in improper fit.

6. Perform a fit check.
 - a. Inhale rapidly – mask should collapse slightly
 - b. Exhale – use hands to check for leaks around face

If air leaks around the nose, adjust the nosepiece as described in step 5. If air leaks at mask edges, adjust straps back along the sides of your head. Perform a fit check again.

Removing an N95 Mask

1. Perform hand hygiene using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. The contaminated part of the mask will be the outside front of the mask, so remove using the elastics at the back of the head/neck.
3. Lift the bottom elastic over your head.
4. Without touching the material at the front of the mask, lift the top elastic off your head.
5. Discard the mask. If reusing the mask, see guidelines below.
6. Perform hand hygiene.

Masks are disposable but can be re-used repeatedly over the course of an 8 – 12 hour shift under the following conditions:

1. It is only to be used by one healthcare worker;
2. It is only to be used in the care of one patient; and,
3. The mask must be stored in a clean, dry location, such as a paper bag. Write your name on the outside of the bag to identify the mask as yours. Do not write on the mask.

Do not leave mask hanging around your neck. Humidity, dirt, and crushing reduce the efficiency of the mask.

Length of Mask Usage

There are no published data on the length of time a mask is effective for the wearer. Health Canada recommends masks should be changed if they become wet, interfere with breathing, are damaged or visibly soiled. A mask that has been exposed to a pathogen is considered contaminated and should be discarded. Masks should be changed between patients.

N95 Pre / Post - Test

1. Name a disease that an N95 mask is designed to offer protection against.

2. Name a disease that a surgical mask will offer adequate protection against.

3. Which type of mask does the wearer need to be *fit-tested* for?

Surgical

N95

4. How often should a mask be fit-checked?

5. Can you wear the same N95 mask when caring for two different patients?

Yes

No

6. Airborne pathogens include (circle all that apply):

- a. Tuberculosis
- b. Chicken Pox
- c. Influenza
- d. C. difficile

7. A condition which might reduce the effectiveness of an N95 mask would be (circle all that apply):

- a. The mask is wet
- b. The mask is visibly dirty
- c. The mask is crushed
- d. The mask is torn

8. How often is fit testing required (circle all that apply)?

- a. Annually
- b. Every two years
- c. Every three years
- d. After a woman has been pregnant

9. Current recommendations are for the use of N95 masks during an influenza pandemic.

True

False