

N95 Mask Commonly Asked Questions

Q: What is an N95 mask?

A: An N95 mask is a disposable filtering facepiece respirator with two straps. When worn properly (with the mask making a tight seal with the user's face), it can protect against hazardous airborne particles. N95 masks do not protect against gases, vapors or asbestos, and they do not provide oxygen. The "N" designation means the mask is not resistant to the effects of oil mists. For instruction on using filtering facepieces, see [Using Disposable Respirators](#) in English and Spanish.

Q: When and how should an N95 mask be worn?

A: When the working conditions include harmful exposure to airborne contaminants such as wildfire smoke, employers must provide respiratory protection. N95 masks can reduce the risk of inhaling the fine particles contained in smoke produced by wildfires. These fine particles can harm health. The masks will not protect the user if the mask does not make a tight seal with the user's face. Facial hair will prevent a tight seal. The mask must be put on correctly.



Q: Is an employer required to provide N95 masks to workers?

A: The employer must first determine whether respirator use is voluntary or required. Employers are required to provide respiratory protection if the working conditions include harmful exposures. Along with providing the respirators, the employer must have a written respiratory protection program that addresses: proper selection of respiratory equipment; employee training; medical evaluation of an employee's ability to wear a respirator; ensuring proper fit of the respirators; and proper respirator use, storage, and cleaning. The employer must also follow all other applicable requirements in [section 5144](#).

Q: Can an employer distribute N95 masks to workers?

A: The employer must first determine whether respirator use is voluntary or required. Where respirator use is voluntary, the employer may provide respirators at the workers' request, or permit workers to use their own respirators. In this situation, employers are not required to have a written respiratory protection program or medically evaluate and fit test workers. However, the employer must ensure that the workers' use of a respirator will not create a hazard. The employer must also provide respirator users with the information contained in California Code of Regulations, Title 8, [section 5144](#), [Appendix D](#), and must follow all other requirements in [section 5144](#), subsection (c)(2).

Q: Can workers bring in their own N95 masks?

A: The employer must first determine whether respirator use is voluntary or required. Where respirator use is voluntary, the employer may permit workers to use their own respirators or provide respirators at the workers' request. In this situation, employers are not required to have a written respiratory protection program or medically evaluate and fit test workers. However, the employer must ensure that the workers' use of a respirator will not create a hazard. The employer must also provide respirator users with the information contained in California Code of Regulations, title 8, [section 5144](#), [Appendix D](#), and must follow all other requirements in [section 5144](#), subsection (c)(2).

Q: Where can employers and workers obtain N95 masks?

A: N95 masks from state and local agencies are available at various locations in response to recent wildfires. Find the location nearest you on the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) webpage:
<http://wildfirerecovery.org/services/air-monitoring/>

Q: Where can employers and workers find additional information?

A: Guidance for employers and workers on working safely in conditions with heavy smoke caused by the wildfires is available on Cal/OSHA's web page: [Worker Safety and Health in Wildfire Regions](#) and [Cal/OSHA's Respiratory Protection](#) publication. We also recommend you check the US EPA air quality webpage (www.airnow.gov) and with your local air quality agencies and public health offices for air quality conditions and recommended precautions. For more information about California wildfires response and recovery, visit www.WildfireRecovery.org.