





## Guidance on Facemasks and Respirator Use During the COVID-19 Pandemic

### Should you wear a facemask or do you need to wear a respirator for COVID-19?





**Facemasks:** It is recommended that all persons on campus wear a facemask when around other people if social distances of six (6) feet cannot be maintained. These masks slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Examples of these are shown below.

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|  |                    |  |  |
| Dust mask – Typically has only one strap but may have two.                        | Surgical mask – Typically has two straps that either go around your ears or may go behind your head | Surgical mask  | A hand-made facemask  |

For purchased facemasks, review the manufacturer’s instructions. Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer before putting-on or taking-off a facemask. They can be reused but should be discarded if they become soiled, damaged, or if you are exposed to potentially infectious material from another person (e.g. by cough or sneeze). There are no fit testing, training or medical clearance requirements when using facemasks. Guidance on how to wash *hand-made* face masks can be found in Appendix A.

**Respirators:** Health care and rescue squad personnel should wear a respirator if they are working with suspect or confirmed COVID-19 positive persons, are performing medical procedures that could generate aerosols from that person, or as recommended by the CDC. Clinicians and researchers working with non-attenuated COVID-19 virus may also need to wear respiratory protection. Designated university personnel who disinfect a room or area immediately after it is vacated by a COVID-19 positive person may also need to wear a respirator.

The most commonly used types of respirators found on campus are shown below. Respirators with exhalation valves, including N95 respirators, allow unfiltered exhaled air to be released and will not protect others near you against COVID-19 unless social distances can be maintained. If social distances cannot be maintained, the respirators marked with an “X” cannot be used except as outlined below.

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
|       |      |  |  |
| Filtering facepiece respirator (N95, N100) The one on the right has an exhalation valve. | Elastomeric half-mask respirator shown with a high efficiency particulate (HEPA) filter | A full-face elastomeric respirator  | A powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR)   |

Respirators with exhalation valves may be worn under the following circumstances:

- You are performing work in an area where the level of a chemical(s) is over permissible limits. If social distance cannot be maintained, your respirator must have stacked cartridges that include HEPA filtration. Please contact EHS for guidance as needed.
- You are performing work in a laboratory or other space where all persons are wearing N95 respirators or respirators with a higher level of protection (N99, N100, HEPA).
- You are performing work where social distances of six (6) feet or more can be maintained.

If you use a respirator at work, there are two categories of user:

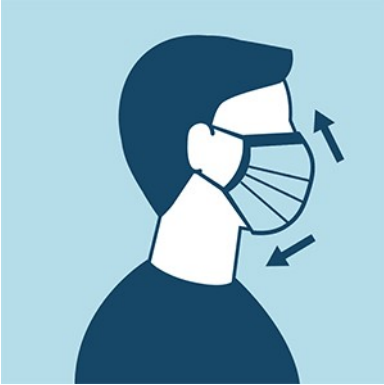
- I. **Voluntary Users:** People who are provided a filtering facepiece respirator to wear but where social distances can usually be maintained, or who choose to wear a filtering facepiece respirator they bring from home, are called 'voluntary users'.
  - *If you are a filtering facepiece voluntary user, you need to review Appendix B at the end of this document. There are no medical clearance or fit testing requirements for voluntary users of filtering facepiece respirators.*
  - *If you wear any other type of respiratory protection, even if you bring it from home, you must review Appendix B and must be medically cleared as outlined for 'respirator users', but you do not need to be fit tested.*
- II. **Respirator Users:** If you are told you need to wear a respirator because of airborne hazards you are exposed to at work, then you are a 'respirator user'. People in this category include:
  - People who are exposed to chemicals or dusts above permissible limits.
  - Health care and rescue squad personnel who are working with suspect or confirmed COVID-19 positive persons, and are performing medical procedures that could generate aerosols from that person.
  - Researchers working with COVID-19 specimens or SARS-CoV-2, or who perform any other biological research where the IBC has mandated respirator use.
  - Designated university personnel who disinfect a room or area immediately after it is vacated by a COVID-19 positive person.

Respirator users must be medically cleared by EHS, fit tested to their respirator if required, and must be trained. You can arrange these services by writing to [ehsmedserv@vt.edu](mailto:ehsmedserv@vt.edu) or by calling 1-3998. *Other COVID-19 exposures where the use of a respirator may be needed will be evaluated by EHS on a case-by-case basis upon request.*

- ⇒ If you were fitted and medically cleared within the past year for the specific brand and model of respirator you have been assigned, no action is required before you begin using the respirator.
- ⇒ If you are provided a different model of N95 or a different type of respirator, you must contact EHS to be fit tested to your new respirator.

The flow chart in Appendix C will help you with determining what actions you need to take.

## Appendix A: How to Wear a Cloth Face Covering



Cloth face coverings should—

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

### Homemade Cloth Face Coverings

It is recommended you wear cloth face coverings at work and in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies).

The use of simple cloth face coverings slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure.

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

The cloth face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.



### Should cloth face coverings be washed or otherwise cleaned regularly? How regularly?

Yes. They should be routinely washed depending on the frequency of use.

### How does one safely sterilize/clean a cloth face covering?

A washing machine should suffice in properly washing a face covering.

### How does one safely remove a used cloth face covering?

Individuals should be careful not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth when removing their face covering and wash hands immediately after removing.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>



## **Appendix B: Information for Employees Using Respirators When Not Required Under the Standard**

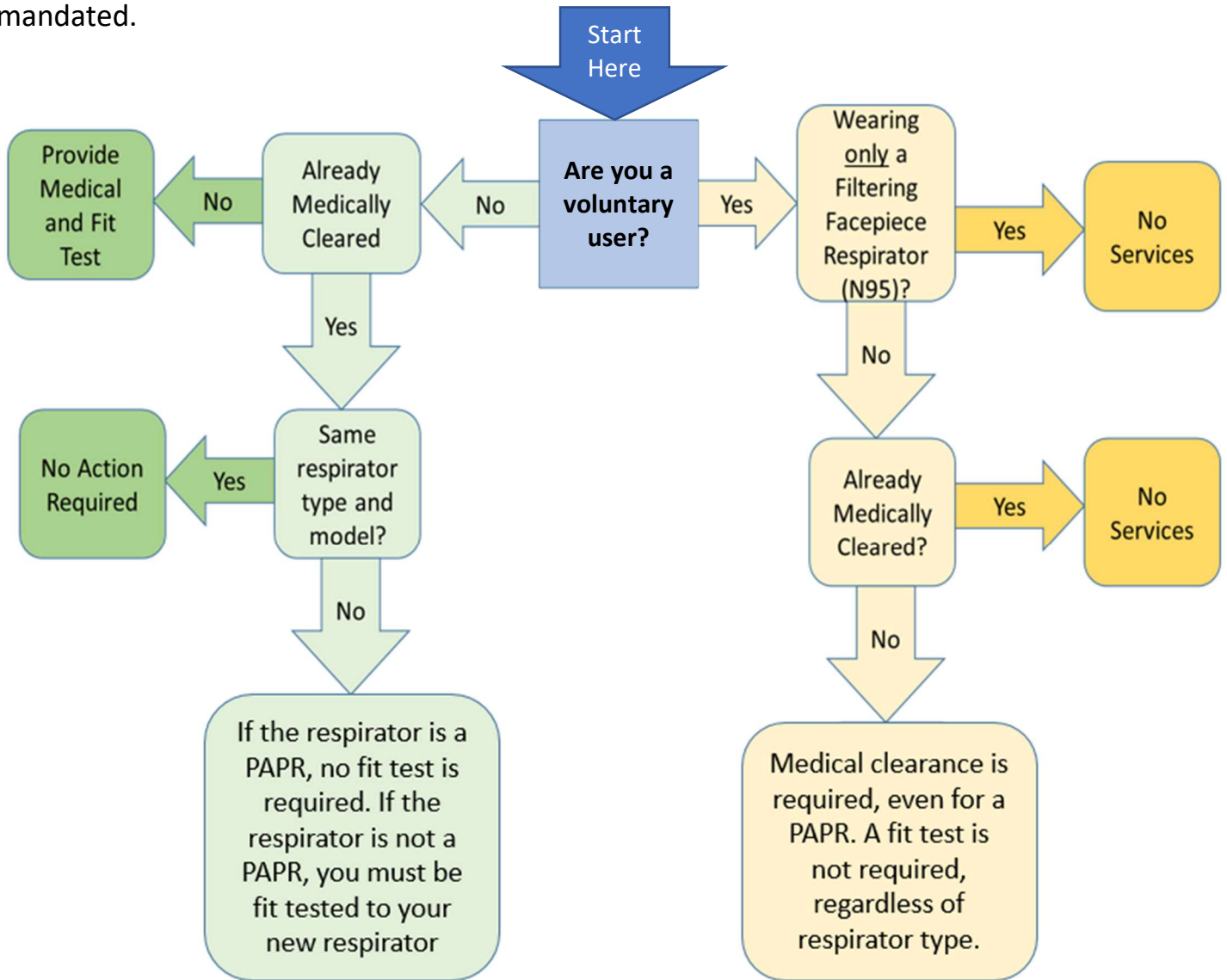
Respirators are an effective method of protection against designated hazards when properly selected and worn. Respirator use is encouraged, even when exposures are below the exposure limit, to provide an additional level of comfort and protection for workers. However, if a respirator is used improperly or not kept clean, the respirator itself can become a hazard to the worker. Sometimes, workers may wear respirators to avoid exposures to hazards, even if the amount of hazardous substance does not exceed the limits set by OSHA standards. If your employer provides respirators for your voluntary use, or if you provide your own respirator, you need to take certain precautions to be sure that the respirator itself does not present a hazard. You should do the following:

1. Read and heed all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirators limitations.
2. Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern. NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, certifies respirators. A label or statement of certification should appear on the respirator or respirator packaging. It will tell you what the respirator is designed for and how much it will protect you.
3. Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors, or very small solid particles of fumes or smoke.
4. Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.

If you have any questions, please contact Environmental Health and Safety at 540-231-3600.

## Appendix C: Guidance on When Medical Services are Needed When Using Respiratory Protection

Voluntary Users are those persons who are provided, or who choose to wear, a respirator (of any type), but the person will not be exposed to any chemical or dust above permissible limits, nor work with infectious agents where respiratory protection has been mandated.



All medical services, including respirator fit testing, are provided through the EHS Occupational Health Clinic, which is located at 2020 Kraft Dr in Suite 2100. From campus, heading south on Southgate Drive, turn onto Research Center Drive and then right onto Kraft Drive. To schedule an appointment, send an email to [ehsmedserv@vt.edu](mailto:ehsmedserv@vt.edu) or call 1-3998.