



AGENCY FOR HEALTHCARE RESEARCH AND QUALITY



Respirator Fit Testing

What It Is, Why You Need It, and What You Can Expect

Healthcare staff who come into contact with people who have or may have COVID-19 are required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE). Respirators, such as N95 Filtering Facepiece Respirators (N95 FFRs) and elastomeric respirators, that fit your face properly help prevent the spread of germs. Your respirator must be fit tested before you use it for the first time and then once each year.

What Is Fit Testing?

Fit testing is the method for finding the respirator that fits your face and making sure it provides a tight seal to help keep you protected.

Why Do You Need To Be Fit Tested?

Fit testing helps ensure you wear the right respirator to protect you from germs and prevent you from spreading germs to others. Your healthcare facility is expected to provide you with adequate PPE, including a respirator that fits correctly. Sizes of respirators are not the same across models or brands.

If you need to wear a respirator, like an N95 FFR, to perform your job, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires your healthcare facility to follow the Respiratory Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.134). Respirator fit testing is just one important part of a healthcare facility's Respiratory Protection Program.

Any respirator (N95 FFR or elastomeric) must be fit tested before the first use if your job exposes you to people who have or may have COVID-19. After that, your employer should test your fitting with the respirator every year and whenever something happens that could affect the seal. The respirator seal may be affected by physical changes, including weight loss or gain, shaving or growing facial hair, or dental procedures that change the shape of your face.

What Can You Expect During a Fit Test?

The common fit test for most respirators uses your sense of smell or taste to see if air is leaking between your face and the respirator. Before your respirator fit test:

- Avoid eating, drinking (except plain water), smoking, or chewing gum for 15 minutes before the test.
- Complete the required [OSHA medical evaluation questionnaire](#).
- Be sure your employer has taught you correct respirator donning (putting on), doffing (taking off), use, care, and disposal.



- Work with the person conducting the fit test to choose the respirator that fits you the best.
- Make sure that the make, model, and size of the respirator you wear for your fit test is the same type you wear when you are working.
- If you will wear glasses or other eye protection with your respirator, you must wear them during the fit test.
- Facial hair must not interfere with the seal of the respirator. Check with your supervisor about your workplace policies and procedures on PPE.

During your fit test:

1. The fit tester will place a large lightweight hood over your head.
2. The tester will spray a solution into the hood and ask if you taste or smell the solution. The purpose of this step is to make sure you are able to smell the solution. If you are not able to detect the spray, a different type of fit test may be suggested.
3. The tester will remove the hood and ask you to don your respirator.
4. The hood will be placed over your head again, and the tester will spray the solution into the hood and ask if you taste or smell the solution.
5. The tester will also ask you to breathe normally, breathe deeply, turn your head side to side and up and down, and speak.



If you do not smell or taste the solution while you are wearing the respirator, the fit test is complete. If you can smell or taste the solution while wearing the respirator, the respirator must be re-fitted, or you must choose a different size or style and take the test again.

A Seal Check Is Not a Fit Test

A seal check is used to see if the respirator is positioned on your face correctly. You should do a seal check every time you wear your respirator following the instructions provided by the respirator manufacturer. A seal check is not a substitute for a fit test.

To do a seal check:

1. Put your respirator on and make sure it fits snugly on your face, especially around the nose.
2. Place both hands over the surface of the respirator and exhale. You should not feel any air leaking between your face and the respirator. Your eyeglasses should not fog.
3. Adjust the respirator until no air leaks out when you exhale.



Ask your supervisor for help if you cannot perform or pass the seal check.

Do not enter a hazardous area until your respirator passes the annual test and the seal check.

Additional Resources

Respirator Fit Testing Guidance

[Facial Hairstyles and Filtering Facepiece Respirators](#)

[Filtering out Confusion: Frequently Asked Questions about Respiratory Protection, Fit Testing](#)

[The Need for Fit Testing During Emerging Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)

[Why Are Annual Fit Tests Required?](#)

Respirator Guidance

[National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\) Certified Equipment List Search](#)

[OSHA COVID-19 Healthcare Emergency Temporary Standard](#)

[OSHA Fit Testing Procedures](#)

[OSHA Respiratory Protection – Standard 1910.134](#)

[OSHA Respiratory Protection Training](#)

[Proper N95 Respirator Use for Respiratory Protection Preparedness](#)



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