COVID-19 Facemasks vs. Respirators: Understanding the Difference

![Cloth or Paper Face Mask](image1)
![Surgical Face Mask](image2)
![Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95)](image3)

**Testing & Approval**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: Not tested or approved, but currently recommended by the CDC.
- Surgical Face Mask: Cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration per 21 CFR 878.4040.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH per 42 CFR Part 84.

**Intended Use & Purpose**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: To prevent transmission of the virus between people in close proximity.
- Surgical Face Mask: A fluid resistant barrier designed to protect the wearer from large droplets, splashes or sprays of bodily or other hazardous fluids.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): Reduces the wearer’s exposure to small particle aerosols and large droplets.

**Who Should Wear?**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: Everyone in public settings where social distancing is infeasible e.g. grocery store or pharmacy.
- Surgical Face Mask: Healthcare workers when N95 respirators are not available and patients who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): Healthcare workers providing care to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases.

**Face Seal Fit**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: Loose-Fitting.
- Surgical Face Mask: Loose-Fitting.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): Tight-Fitting.

**Fit Test Required?**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: No*.
- Surgical Face Mask: No*.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): Yes**.

**User Seal Check Required?**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: No.
- Surgical Face Mask: No.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): Yes, each time the respirator is donned.

**Filtration**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: Not classified as a filtering facepiece respirator to protect against inhaling smaller airborne particles.
- Surgical Face Mask: Not classified as a filtering facepiece respirator to protect against inhaling smaller airborne particles.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): Filters ~95% of small and large airborne particles.

**Leakage**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: Leakage occurs around the edge of the mask when user inhales.
- Surgical Face Mask: Leakage occurs around the edge of the mask when user inhales.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): When properly fitted, minimal leakage occurs around edges of the respirator when user inhales.

**Use Limitations**
- Cloth or Paper Face Mask: Reusable. Launder routinely in a washing machine, depending on frequency of use. Discard if mask becomes misshapen or damaged.
- Surgical Face Mask: Not designed for reuse. Discard after each patient encounter.
- Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95): Ideally discarded after each patient encounter; limited reuse acceptable under certain conditions.

*Fit tests are not required for loose-fitting facepieces.
**OSHA has issued temporary enforcement guidance regarding filtering facepiece respirators and OSHA requirements. Additional information regarding fit testing during the COVID-19 outbreak can be found under the March 14, 2020 memo and the April 8, 2020 memo.
The employer determines the necessary PPE required for the job task(s). The employer is responsible for payment, replacement, maintenance, cleaning, laundering, and disposal of PPE. Training should be provided to employees regarding proper use, limitations, care, and maintenance of PPE. Where respirators are provided, the following table outlines additional requirements:

### Employer Guide to Voluntary vs. Required Respirator Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines for Employees Using Respiratory Protection</th>
<th>Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g. N95)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fit Testing</td>
<td>Required Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Evaluation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial Hair Prohibited</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D Provided</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training per 1910.134(k)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning, Storage &amp; Maintenance of Respirator</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Are respirators:**
- Necessary to protect the health of the employee; or
- Required by the employer?

**Must establish and implement a written respiratory protection program with work-site specific procedures.**

**Does the employer permit voluntary use of respirators?**

**No respirators are provided.**

**Are filtering facepieces (e.g. N95) the only respirators provided for voluntary use?**

**YES**
- Employer determines that the respirator itself does not create a hazard.
- Must provide users with information contained in Appendix D.
- No respiratory protection program required.

**NO**

**NO**
- Employer determines that the respirator itself does not create a hazard.
- Must provide users with information contained in Appendix D.
- Must establish and implement those elements of a written respiratory protection program necessary to ensure the employee is medically able to use that respirator.