

COVID-19 Facemasks vs. Respirators: Understanding the Difference



Cloth or Paper Face Mask



Surgical Face Mask



**Filtering Facepiece Respirator
(e.g. N95)**

Testing & Approval	Not tested or approved, but currently recommended by the CDC.	Cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration per 21 CFR 878.4040.	Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH per 42 CFR Part 84 .
Intended Use & Purpose	To prevent transmission of the virus between people in close proximity.	A fluid resistant barrier designed to protect the wearer from large droplets, splashes or sprays of bodily or other hazardous fluids.	Reduces the wearer's exposure to small particle aerosols and large droplets.
Who Should Wear?	Everyone in public settings where social distancing is infeasible e.g., grocery store or pharmacy.	Healthcare workers when N95 respirators are not available and patients who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19.	Healthcare workers providing care to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases.
Face Seal Fit	Loose-Fitting	Loose-Fitting	Tight-Fitting
Fit Test Required?	No*	No*	Yes**
User Seal Check Required?	No	No	Yes, each time the respirator is donned.
Filtration	Not classified as a filtering face-piece respirator to protect against inhaling smaller airborne particles.	Not classified as a filtering face-piece respirator to protect against inhaling smaller airborne particles.	Filters ~95% of small and large airborne particles.
Leakage	Leakage occurs around the edge of the mask when user inhales.	Leakage occurs around the edge of the mask when user inhales.	When properly fitted, minimal leakage occurs around edges of the respirator when user inhales.
Use Limitations	Reusable. Launder routinely in a washing machine, depending on frequency of use. Discard if mask becomes misshapen or damaged.	Not designed for reuse. Discard after each patient encounter.	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 on the NC Department of Labor's [Coronavirus](#) webpage.

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

Guidelines for Employees Using Respiratory Protection		
	Filtering Facepiece Respirator (e.g., N95)	
	Required Use	Voluntary Use
Fit Testing	Yes	No
Medical Evaluation	Yes	No
Facial Hair Prohibited	Yes	No
Appendix D Provided	No	Yes
Training per 1910.134(k)	Yes	No
Cleaning, Storage & Maintenance of Respirator	Yes	Yes

