

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Optimizing Limited Supplies of N95 Respirators

BACKGROUND

On February 29, the CDC updated previous guidance on optimizing limited resources of personal protective equipment (PPE)¹. The guidance included recommendations for contingency capacity strategies including reuse, extended use, and use of respirators beyond their manufacturer-designated shelf life.

While LACDPH, CDPH and Cal/OSHA previously did not recommend using these contingency strategies, the growing number of COVID-19 cases and the presence of critical N95 respirator shortages at healthcare facilities in Los Angeles County now necessitates a change in strategy.

RECOMMENDATION TO ADOPT CDC CONTINGENCY CAPACITY STRATEGIES FOR N95 RESPIRATORS

Hospitals that have taken reasonable steps to conserve supplies of N95 masks and are still experiencing shortages should consider adopting the CDC contingency strategies. These strategies require specialized training and education to ensure the safety of healthcare workers and patients. We are providing this guidance for facilities that are considering or choose to practice these strategies.

USE OF N95 RESPIRATORS BEYOND THE MANUFACTURER-DESIGNATED SHELF LIFE

- N95 respirators beyond their designated shelf life can be used for fit-testing and training purposes.
- Using respirators beyond their recommended shelf life for clinical use should be considered if shortage becomes critical and there are no adequate alternatives.
- Review guidance to confirm that the strategies apply to mask types available to you
- Masks should be inspected before use to ensure that the respirator and straps are intact.
- Review further specific guidance on handling of respirators in CDC guidance.²
- Review CDC testing of stockpiled N95 respirators.³

EXTENDED USE OF N95 RESPIRATORS

Extended use refers to the practice of wearing the same N95 respirator for repeated close contact encounters with several patients, without removing the respirator between patient encounters. Extended use may be implemented when multiple patients are infected with the same respiratory pathogen and patients are placed together in dedicated waiting rooms or hospital wards. N95s have been worn safely for up to 8 hours straight in industrial testing.

- Discard N95 respirators following use during aerosol-generating procedures.
- Discard N95 respirators contaminated with blood, respiratory or nasal secretions, or other bodily fluids from patients.
- Discard N95 respirators following close contact with, or exit from, the care area of any patient co-infected with an infectious disease requiring contact precautions.

- Consider use of a cleanable face shield over an N95 respirator and/or other steps (e.g., masking patients, use of engineering controls) to reduce surface contamination.
- Perform hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after touching or adjusting the respirator (if necessary for comfort or to maintain fit).
- Discard any respirator that is obviously damaged or becomes hard to breathe through.

REUSE OF N95 RESPIRATORS

Reuse of respirators refers to the practice of using the same N95 respirator for multiple encounters with the same patient but removing it ('doffing') after each encounter. The respirator is stored in between encounters to be put on again ('donned') prior to the next encounter with the same patient.

- Respirators used for fit testing may be reused in the clinical setting if not damaged.
- Discard N95 respirators following use during aerosol-generating procedures.
- Discard N95 respirators contaminated with blood, respiratory or nasal secretions, or other bodily fluids from patients.
- Discard N95 respirators following close contact with any patient co-infected with an infectious disease requiring contact precautions.
- Use a cleanable face shield (preferred) or a surgical mask over an N95 respirator and/or other steps (e.g., masking patients, use of engineering controls), when feasible to reduce surface contamination of the respirator.
- Hang used respirators in a designated storage area or keep them in a clean, breathable container such as a paper bag between uses. To minimize potential cross-contamination, store respirators so that they do not touch each other and the person using the respirator is clearly identified. Storage containers should be discarded or cleaned regularly.
- Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after touching or adjusting the respirator (if necessary for comfort or to maintain fit).
- Avoid touching the inside of the respirator. If inadvertent contact is made with the inside of the respirator, perform hand hygiene as described above.
- Use a pair of clean (non-sterile) gloves when donning a used N95 respirator and performing a user seal check. Discard gloves after the N95 respirator is donned and any adjustments are made to ensure the respirator is sitting comfortably on your face with a good seal.

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirators-strategy/contingency-capacity-strategies.html>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hcwcontrols/recommendedguidanceextuse.html>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/release-stockpiled-N95.html>