



Office of Congressional Workplace Rights (OCWR) Approved Guidance: Use of N95 & KN95* Masks to Protect Against COVID-19

January 13, 2022

Note: This guidance is for legislative branch employees and employing offices who are using N95 or KN95 masks strictly for protection against COVID-19 and not for other purposes. If respirators are to be used in the workplace for any other purpose, the employing office must comply with the requirements of OSHA's respiratory protection standard, 29 C.F.R. § 1910.134.

N95s and KN95s are types of respirators which, when worn properly, form a tight fit around a person's breathing zone. These types of protective equipment are called **Filtering Facepiece Respirators or FFRs**.

Although FFRs alone cannot prevent all transmission or exposure to COVID-19, they provide better protection to the wearer than cloth, surgical, or similar masks. To maximize protection and prevent the spread of the virus in the workplace, combine the wearing of FFRs with vaccination and boosting, social distancing, proper hygiene, and telework when possible.

Steps for proper FFR use:

1. **Wash your hands** with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. **Inspect your mask** before each use to make sure it is dry and not visibly soiled or damaged.
3. **Put the mask on properly**, covering your mouth and nose, with the straps or ear loops positioned correctly.
4. **Perform a user seal check** to ensure that the mask is creating a seal around your breathing zone, using either a positive pressure or negative pressure check:

Positive pressure check – Place your hands over the facepiece, covering as much surface area as possible. Exhale gently into the facepiece. The face fit is considered satisfactory if a slight positive pressure is being built up inside the facepiece without any evidence of outward leakage of air at the seal. Examples of evidence that it is leaking could be the feeling of air movement on your face along the seal of the facepiece, fogging of your glasses, or a lack of pressure being built up inside the facepiece.

Negative pressure check – Cover the filter surface with your hands as much as possible and then inhale. The facepiece should collapse on your face and you should not feel air passing between your face and the facepiece.

If air is leaking, reposition the mask to improve the seal. Replace the FFR with a new one if necessary.

5. If you plan to reuse the FFR, **store it in a paper bag or other breathable storage container** and keep it away from moisture.

Important notes:

- Keep track of your mask so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's.
- Respirators with exhalation valves are not recommended.
- If a respirator is used improperly or not kept clean, the respirator itself can become a hazard to the worker. Read and follow all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirator's limitations. *If you were provided with a mask but no manufacturer's instructions, please request a copy of those instructions from your employer.*
- If you experience shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing, chest pain, or any other respiratory or cardiovascular symptoms while wearing your FFR, please remove it immediately, replace it with a properly-fitting cloth or surgical mask, and consult either the Office of Attending Physician or another medical provider. If you have an existing respiratory or cardiovascular condition, please consult with your physician before using a respirator.
- If you cannot achieve a good seal after checking the mask for damage and repositioning it on your face, consider wearing a different style of FFR that might fit your face better.
- Facial hair may impede your ability to achieve a good seal. Consider shaving or trimming facial hair to improve the seal and increase protection.
- Whether FFRs can be reused – and how many times they can be worn – depends on the duration and frequency of use. The more the mask is worn over the course of the day, the sooner it should be discarded and replaced. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends discarding each FFR after a maximum of 5 uses, or sooner if it becomes damaged or soiled, contributes to labored breathing, or no longer seals properly. Users should also wait 5 days between using each mask if possible, so it is recommended to have several masks available to rotate from day to day. Be sure to store each mask in a paper bag or other breathable storage container between uses.

Sources

OSHA guidance on proper FFR mask wearing:

<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4015.pdf>

CDC directions for user seal checks: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2018-130/pdfs/2018-130.pdf>

Office of Attending Physician guidance on FFRs: <https://attendingphysician.house.gov/masking-kn95-versus-n95>

OSHA standard for mini respiratory protection programs: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-29/subtitle-B/chapter-XVII/part-1910/subpart-U/section-1910.504>

** Although KN95 respirators are not approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), they may be appropriate for use in non-healthcare settings, especially when N95s are in short supply.*