

OSHA Issues New Guidance on Use of N95 Respirators

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In the wake of the coronavirus outbreak and the shortage of N95 filtering facepiece respirators (FFRs), the Occupational Safety and Health Commission [has issued temporary guidance](#) for enforcing the Respiratory Protection Standard and other health standards. The guidance applies to all workplaces where employees use N95 FFRs.

All employers are instructed to "reassess their engineering controls, work practices, and administrative controls to identify any changes they can make to decrease the need for N95 respirators." OSHA offers a number of suggestions, including moving operations outdoors, suspending non-essential operations, or using other National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health-approved FFRs.

Where alternatives are not available or would create additional safety hazards, the guidance permits employers to use or reuse N95 FFRs that were NIOSH-approved but have since passed the manufacturer's recommended shelf life. If extended use or reuse becomes necessary, an N95 FFR may be used by the same worker only, as long as the respirator maintains its structural and functional integrity and the filter material is not physically damaged, soiled or contaminated. Users should perform a user seal check each time they wear a respirator and should not use the respirator if they cannot perform a successful user seal check. The guidance imposes training and policy requirements on employers should they need to implement extended use or reuse of N95 FFRs.

For health care employers only, the guidance states that expired N95 FFRs should never be used during care of a COVID-19 infected patient and reiterates CDC guidelines on optimizing supply of respirators.

If your businesses commonly uses the N95 FFRs and you have questions on this latest guidance, please [contact me](#) or any member of the [Barley Snyder Employment Practice Group](#).

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