



COVID-19

OSHA's Rule Relaxation For Fit Testing and Use of Expired Respirators

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Are expired N95 masks that are not part of the SNS stockpile suitable for use?

A: Some U.S. stockpiles include N95 filtering facepiece respirators (N95s) that have exceeded their manufacturer-designated shelf life. U.S. Government decision makers are considering whether these products should be released for use during the COVID-19 response. Information is provided below that may be used to inform these product release decisions. In times of respiratory protective device shortage, such as during the COVID-19 response, supplies must be managed so that protection against exposure is adequate. For more information please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/release-stockpiled-N95.html>

CDC recommends that N95s that have exceeded their manufacturer-designated shelf life should be used only as outlined in the [Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of N95 Respirators](#).

Q: Where can I find more information about use of expired respirators when supplies are low?

A: More information can be found at the link below:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirators-strategy/crisis-alternate-strategies.html>

Per CDC guidance, use of additional N95 respirators beyond the manufacturer-designated shelf life for care of patients with COVID-19, tuberculosis, measles, and varicella can be considered. However, respirators beyond the manufacturer-designated shelf life may not perform to the requirements for which they were certified. Over time, components such as the straps and nose bridge material may degrade, which can affect the quality of the fit and seal. Some models have been found NOT to perform in accordance with NIOSH performances standards, and consideration may be given to use these respirators as identified in [Release of Stockpiled N95 Filtering Facepiece Respirators Beyond the Manufacturer-Designated Shelf Life: Considerations for the COVID-19 Response](#). In addition, consideration can be given to use N95 respirators beyond the manufacturer-designated shelf life that have not been evaluated by NIOSH. It is optimal to use these respirators in the context of a respiratory protection program that includes medical evaluation, training, and fit testing. It is particularly important that HCP perform the expected seal check, prior to entering a patient care area.

Q: What should be checked to make sure they are still good?

A: More information can be found at the link below:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/release-stockpiled-N95.html>

Per CDC guidance, users should take the following precautionary measures prior to using the respirator in the workplace:

- Visually inspect the N95 to determine if its integrity has been compromised.
- Check that components such as the straps, nose bridge, and nose foam material did not degrade, which can affect the quality of the fit, and seal and therefore the effectiveness of the respirator.

- If the integrity of any part of the respirator is compromised, or if a successful user seal check cannot be performed, discard the respirator and try another respirator.
- Users should perform a **user seal check** immediately after they don each respirator and should not use a respirator on which they cannot perform a successful user seal check.

Accordingly, CDC/NIOSH believes the following products, despite being past their manufacturer-designated shelf life, should provide the expected level of protection to the user if the stockpile conditions have generally been in accordance with the manufacturer-recommended storage conditions and an OSHA-compliant respiratory protection program is used by employers. In alphabetical order, these models are:

- 3M 1860
- 3M 1870
- 3M 8210
- 3M 9010
- 3M 8000
- Gerson 1730
- Medline/Alpha Protech NON27501
- Moldex 1512
- Moldex 2201

Q: What measures are being taken by OSHA regarding fit testing requirements during the COVID-19 response?

A: On March 14th, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) released Temporary Enforcement Guidance - Healthcare Respiratory Protection Annual Fit-Testing for N95 Filtering Facepieces During the COVID-19 Outbreak. The guidance can be found here: <https://www.osha.gov/memos/2020-03-14/temporary-enforcement-guidance-healthcare-respiratory-protection-annual-fit>.

A fit test is required for anyone wearing a respirator to protect against COVID-19. Annual fit test can be temporarily suspended if the employee has already been fit tested to that respirator.

In summary:

- ✓ Perform initial fit tests for each HCP with the same model, style, and size respirator that the worker will be required to wear for protection against COVID-19 (initial fit testing is essential to determine if the respirator properly fits the worker and is capable of providing the expected level of protection);
- ✓ Inform workers that the employer is temporarily suspending the annual fit testing of N95 filtering facepiece respirators to preserve and prioritize the supply of respirators for use in situations where they are required to be worn.