



N95 Mask Commonly Asked Questions

Q: What is an N95 mask?

A: An N95 dust mask is a disposable filtering facepiece respirator with two straps. When worn properly (with the mask making a tight seal with the user's face), it can protect against airborne hazardous particles. N95 dust masks do not protect against gases, vapors or asbestos, and they do not provide oxygen. The "N" designation means the mask is not resistant to the effects of oil mists. For instruction on using filtering facepieces, see [Using Disposable Respirators](#) in English and Spanish.

Q: Where can I get N95 masks?

A: N95 masks from state and local agencies are available at various locations in response to recent wildfires. Find the location nearest you on the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) webpage www.WildfireRecovery.org.

Q: When do I wear my N95 mask?

A: N95 masks can reduce the risk of inhaling the fine particles contained in smoke produced by wildfires. These fine particles can harm health. The masks will not protect the user if the mask does not make a tight seal with the user's face. The mask must be put on correctly, and the user may not have facial hair that interferes with a tight seal.

Q: Can I distribute N95 masks to my employees?

A: Yes, but it is the employer's responsibility to determine whether respirator use is voluntary or required. Where respirator use is voluntary, the employer may provide respirators at the request of employees or permit employees to use their own respirators. The employer must ensure that such respirator use will not itself create a hazard, must provide respirator users with the information contained in California Code of Regulations, title 8, [section 5144, Appendix D](#), and must follow all other requirements in [section 5144](#), subsection (c)(2). Employers are not required to have a written respiratory protection program or medically evaluate and fit test employees.

Q: Am I required to provide N95 masks to my employees?

A: Yes, employers are required to provide respiratory protection if the working conditions include harmful exposures. Along with providing the respirators, the employer must address the following in their written respiratory protection program: proper selection of respiratory equipment; employee training; medical evaluation of an employee's ability to wear a respirator; ensuring proper fit of the respirators; and proper use, storage, and cleaning of respirators. The employer must also follow all other applicable requirements in [section 5144](#).



Q: Can my employees bring in their own N95 masks?

A: Yes, if respiratory use is voluntary. It is the employer's responsibility to determine whether respirator use is voluntary or required. Where respirator use is voluntary, the employer may provide respirators at the request of employees or permit employees to use their own respirators. The employer must ensure that such respirator use will not itself create a hazard, must provide respirator users with the information contained in [section 5144, Appendix D](#), and must follow all other requirements in [section 5144](#), subsection (c)(2). Employers are not required to have a written respiratory protection program or medically evaluate and fit test the employees.

Q: What is voluntary use of an N95 mask?

A: Voluntary use of an N95 mask means that an employee chooses to wear the mask, even though its use is not required by the employer or by any Cal/OSHA regulation.

Q: Where can I find additional information?

A: Guidance for employers and workers on working safely in conditions with heavy smoke caused by the wildfires is available on Cal/OSHA's web page: [Worker Safety and Health in Wildfire Regions](#). We also recommend you check the US EPA air quality webpage (www.airnow.gov/) and with your local air quality agencies and public health offices for air quality conditions and recommended precautions. For more information about California wildfires response and recovery, visit www.WildfireRecovery.org.