



# Helpful Facts on Respirators and Face Coverings

A lot of information is being shared on the use of respirators and face coverings during this pandemic that can cause confusion. Here are some facts to help provide clarity.

- Respirators are used to protect the individual
  - They prevent the virus from entering the respiratory system of the individual wearing the respirator
- Cloth face coverings are used to protect others
  - They prevent the virus from entering the air coming from individuals wearing the face covering, which helps prevent the spread of the virus
  - People may have the COVID-19 without showing symptoms – face coverings will help prevent the spread to others
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not have guidelines for businesses, outside the healthcare industry, related to respirators and face coverings
  - [Available CDC guidelines](#) for businesses do not mention the use of respirators
- The [CDC cloth face covering guidelines](#) for public settings
  - Do not specify whom these guidelines apply to
  - “The cloth face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.”



- NSC recommends the use of face coverings in public settings
  - Employers are encourage to create their own guidance regarding face coverings. Here is an example to get organizations started:
    - With face coverings viewed as an added layer of protection, the company will provide all workers with face coverings. Employees can wear their own face coverings to work if done safely.
    - Workers are allowed to wear various face coverings including homemade cotton versions, bandanas and others.
    - The coverings should be tight-fitting and not hang below the neck, as it could get caught in something and pose a danger.
    - The material a face covering is made from must not create a hazard in high heat environments.
    - Any covering must be inspected by your EHS team to ensure it can be safely worn and meet respiratory regulations.
    - Do not let face coverings sit in a chemical environment.
    - Any reusable face coverings need to properly cleaned at home on a regular basis.
  
- [OSHA Respirator Standard Update](#)
  - This change details interim guidance to Compliance Safety and Health Officers (CSHOs) for enforcing the Respiratory Protection standard, 29 CFR § 1910.134 in response to the shortages of disposable N95 filtering facepiece respirators. It permits the extended use and reuse of respirators, as well as the use of respirators that are expired.
  
- In summary
  - Respirators should be reserved for healthcare industry workers.
  - If a person outside of the healthcare industry does a job requiring a respirator defined by the Respiratory Protection Standard, that organization should still provide that employee with protection. However, it should consider opportunities to extend use, reuse (by same employee) or use expired respirators.
  - NSC recommends the use of face coverings if they are able to be worn safely, and it encourages companies to create guidelines right for their organization.

