

# Surgical Masks v/s Respirators use for COVID-19

This guide aims to provide information regarding the differences between surgical masks and respirators. This will enable users to select and use proper devices which are relevant to the required protection. The use of either a surgical mask or respirator will vary by work tasks, and determined by the risk assessment and /or relevant guidelines. Recommended respirators for COVID-19 include N95 (Medical /Surgical/ Healthcare) and FFP2 respirators. Cloth masks are not recommended for use by front line workers including health workers

## An example of a surgical mask



- Designed to contain exhaled droplets from being expelled into the environment by the wearer/user.
- Does not require fit testing or user seal check.
- Single use only.
- Do not prevent leakages around the edges of the mask when the user inhales.
- Extended use may increase risk of contamination.

## Examples of N95 Respirators



- Designed to achieve a tight fitting face seal and provides a barrier between the user and contaminated environment.
- Requires fit testing to confirm satisfactory fit.
- User seal check is required whenever the respirator is puts on.
- Can be re-used provided procedures are in place to disinfect, prevent contamination and maintain physical integrity and fit.

## Who should wear surgical masks

- As informed by the outcome of the risk assessment.
- Symptomatic (coughing and sneezing) individuals.
- Healthy people taking care of symptomatic people who are also masked.
- Health workers (HWs) who may come into contact with COVID-19 patients who are also masked.

## Who should wear respirators:

- As informed by the outcome of the risk assessment.
- High risk HWs and those doing aerosol-generating procedures (AGPs).
- What are AGPs: These are procedures that stimulate coughing or promotes the generation of fine viral particles (aerosols) e.g. COVID-19 specimen collection, intubation and manual ventilation.

## Compliance with recognised safety standards:

Both surgical masks and respirators should meet the general and performance requirements for their respective safety standards

Recognised safety standard include:

- EN 14683:2005 "Surgical masks -requirements and test methods",
- EN149:2001+A1:2009 "Respiratory protective devices,
- NIOSH certified and FDA cleared, USA surgical respirators,
- SANS 50149:2003, Homologation of SA respiratory products with the SABS,
- SANS 1866-1:2008 & SANS 1866-2:2008, Part 1 & 2, under Medical Devices, Medical face masks and Medical respirators.

## Limitations:

### Surgical masks

- Does not protect the user from exposure to contaminated environment or direct contact with an infection source.

### Respirators

- Facial hair, beards and scars may affect fit.
- Uncomfortable when used for extended periods.
- Not everyone is medically fit to wear respirators.



**Did You Know?**

## OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE

- It is the employer's obligation to provide PPE to employees at no cost to employees.
- Training on proper selection, use (including limitations) and donning and doffing is essential prior to use to prevent self-contamination.
- It is the responsibility of the employees to ensure that proper maintenance, storage and discarding of used PPE is adhered to.



COVID-19 Workplace Preparedness & Prevention  
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