

Guidance on Choosing a Medical Mask or Respirator (N95)

Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is essential in protecting team members and patients. All health care workers should perform a Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA) to determine the most suitable respiratory protection (i.e., a well-fitting medical mask or respirator (N95 or equivalent) or fit-tested N95 respirator (or equivalent) to wear when caring for a patient. Whether to use a medical mask or respirator (N95) is guided by the PCRA, based on:

- the patient’s symptoms or illness
- the degree of contact
- the type of procedure or activity being performed and
- the risk of exposure to respiratory droplets or aerosols.

Type of Mask/ Respirator	Choose when:	Notes:
Well-Fitted Medical Masks or Respirator (N95)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing routine care • Health care workers provide care to patients, residents, or clients with suspected, probable, or confirmed COVID-19 infection and should include a well-fitting medical mask OR respirator (N95) in addition to gloves, face shields with side protection (or goggles), and appropriate isolation gowns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protects against large droplets • Required for all team members in clinical areas as per Nova Scotia Health Respiratory Virus Safety Plan • Fits snugly to the face, covers nose, mouth, and chin without gaps • Changed when damp, soiled, damaged, and after contact with the respiratory secretions of a patient with suspect or confirmed COVID-19
Fit-tested Respirator (N95)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing aerosol-generating medical procedures (AGMPs) on patients with suspect, probable, or confirmed COVID-19 • Responding to CODES requiring airway management based on most recent Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment • Providing care to patients with other infections spread by the airborne route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protects against very fine droplets and aerosols • Must be fit-tested prior to use and be worn properly to be effective • Fits very tightly over nose and mouth to form a tight seal • Change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When it becomes damp, soiled, or damaged ○ When it no longer forms an effective seal to the face ○ When contaminated with blood, respiratory or nasal secretions or other bodily fluids ○ After performing an AGMP (unless using the N95 for prolonged use) ○ After contact with the respiratory secretions of a patient with suspect or confirmed COVID-19 (unless using the N95 for prolonged use)

How to check fit-tested N95 respirator seal: Place both hands along the sides and under the chin of the respirator to make sure there is a good seal. Take a quick breath in to check the seal. Breathe out sharply. If you feel a leak when breathing in or breathing out, there is not a proper seal. Perform again once any adjustments are made.

Reminder: Hand hygiene must be performed before and after donning and doffing PPE including masks, respirators, and eye protection.