

University of Arizona

Voluntary Use of Respiratory Protection During COVID-19

This information applies to the **voluntary use of filtering face piece respirators** (i.e., N95), at the University of Arizona. Respirators protect against airborne hazards when properly selected and used. Respirator use, including medical clearance, fit testing, and training, is regulated by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) Respiratory Protection Standard ([29 CFR 1910.134](#)).

University supervisors, units, or departments that require employees to wear a respirator for their work tasks must complete a hazard assessment with RLSS/RMS for enrollment in the UA Respiratory Protection Program (RPP).

Important: Consistent with CDC guidance, the UA requires face coverings in campus facilities. The [UA Face Coverings](#) directive represents one component in the hierarchy of controls to mitigate risk of COVID-19 exposure and infection. In addition to face coverings, the University has implemented additional measures to reduce exposure potential in indoor spaces that include increased ventilation rates, enhanced filtration, physical barriers, and enhanced disinfection procedures.

The University provides N95 respirators to health care workers, researchers studying the novel coronavirus, and other workers at high risk for exposure. These employees will be enrolled in the UA RPP which requires medical clearance, training, and fit testing per OSHA regulations. Generally, N95 respirators are reserved for these employees. At this time, the University of Arizona will not provide N95 respirators to those voluntarily electing to use N95s for COVID-19 exposure mitigation.

Voluntary use of self-provided filtering face piece (i.e., N95) respirators by employees as a means of protection against COVID-19 is permitted if all the following criteria are met:

- Voluntary use is permitted in all locations on campus **other than those** areas, locations, or environments **where respiratory protection is required** by the University or applicable law. In areas where respiratory protection is required, employees must comply with the RPP.
- Respirator(s) are worn and maintained in accordance with manufacturer instructions and recommendations
- Self-provided filtering face piece respirators **cannot** have an exhalation valve.
- Employees electing to wear self-provided respirators should be medically able to wear them.
 - Users may wish to consult with their physician.
- Before using a self-provided respirator, an **employee must acknowledge** that they have reviewed and agree to comply with the *UA Voluntary Use of Respiratory Protection During COVID-19 – Appendix D* in EDGE Learning.

If you believe that respiratory protection should be required in your work area or while performing certain job duties, please notify your supervisor and/or Risk Management and RLSS.

Voluntary Use of Self-Provided Respirators

1910.134 - Appendix D (Mandatory)

[Information for Employees Using Respirators When Not Required Under the Standard](#)

Respirators are an effective method of protection against designated hazards when properly selected and worn. Respirator use is encouraged, even when exposures are below the exposure limit, to provide an additional level of comfort and protection for workers. However, if a respirator is used improperly or not kept clean, the respirator itself can become a hazard to the worker. Sometimes, workers may wear respirators to avoid exposures to hazards, even if the amount of hazardous substance does not exceed the limits set by OSHA standards. If your employer provides respirators for your voluntary use, or if you provide your own respirator, you need to take certain precautions to be sure that the respirator itself does not present a hazard.

[You should do the following:](#)

1. Read and heed all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirator's limitations.
2. Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern. NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, certifies respirators. A label or statement of certification should appear on the respirator or respirator packaging. It will tell you what the respirator is designed for and how much it will protect you.
3. Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors, or very small solid particles of fumes or smoke.
4. Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.