

Important Update from OSDH

Fit Testing Resources

April 9, 2020



OKLAHOMA State Department of Health

(webpage links are in red)

OSHA's Fit-Testing Requirements

Proper respirator use is essential for healthcare workers who are expected to interact with patients with infectious respiratory diseases. The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\) requires](#) healthcare facilities to maintain a [respiratory protection program](#) that specifies requirements such as annual fit testing, medical clearance, and training. Initial fit testing is required before using a respirator. In addition to annual fit testing, fit testing is required when there are changes in an employee's physical condition that could affect respirator fit and when a worker must wear a new model or type of tight-fitting respirator, such as the common N95 filtering facepiece respirator.

The Purpose of Fit Testing

Fit testing confirms the fit of any respirator that forms a tight seal on the user's face before it is used in the workplace. This ensures that users are receiving the expected level of protection by minimizing contaminant leakage into the facepiece. This all boils down to a simple reality: **if the respirator does not form a seal with the face, it cannot provide the expected level of protection.** Therefore, fit testing at all the OSHA-required times is necessary – however, during large-scale infectious disease outbreaks, there are ways to save time when fit testing as well as conserve supplies.

Note: OSHA issued Temporary Enforcement Guidance – [Healthcare Respiratory Protection Annual Fit Testing for N95 Filtering Facepieces During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#) – on March 14, 2020. This temporary enforcement guidance suspends the annual fit testing requirement of

N95 filtering facepiece respirators. However, initial fit tests for healthcare personnel with the same model, style, and size respirator are still required.

Fit Testing Considerations for Conserving Time and Supplies

With the global impact of COVID-19, qualitative fit testing is the preferred method of fit testing to help slow the depletion of the inventory of N95 respirators, because the respirator used for a qualitative fit test can be worn again after the test.

Be aware that a successful fit test only qualifies you to use the specific brand/make/model and size of respirator that you wore during that test. Respirator sizing is not standardized across models or brands. Do not assume that because you passed a fit test wearing a size medium in one model, a medium of another model or brand will have an equivalent fit: this could result in an improperly fitted respirator and potentially harmful exposure to airborne pathogens.

Just-In-Time Fit Testing

A typical qualitative fit test should take between 15-20 minutes. To mitigate this, facilities may elect to implement the “just-in-time” method for fit testing, which has been incorporated into pandemic plans for many facilities. Just-in-time fit testing is a way to fit test large numbers of workers at one time. An experienced fit test administrator may be able to fit test a maximum of five people simultaneously. This method works by having a fit test administrator fit test five people, while simultaneously training them to also be fit administrators. Those five people can then conduct fit tests for the remaining staff. If multiple people are being fit tested at once, or if fit testing is occurring without significant breaks, it is essential to have additional staff assist with logistics, recordkeeping and management of the equipment.

Facial Hair and Fit Testing

Facial hair is a common frustration when it comes to fit testing employees who aren't accustomed to wearing tight-fitting respirators on a regular basis. However, the facts are straightforward; facial hair that lies along the sealing area of a respirator will cause a respirator to leak. The presence of facial hair under the sealing surface causes 20 to 1000 times more leakage compared to clean-shaven individuals.[1] Facial hair that does not lie along the sealing area of the respirator is considered acceptable.

A facility may consider loose-fitting powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs) as an alternative for employees who are unwilling or unable to shave for both the fit test and during respirator use. This type of respirator uses a battery-powered blower to force air through a particle filter for the wearer to breathe.

To read the complete CDC article click: <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2020/04/01/fit-testing-during-outbreaks/>

Fit-Test Administrator List

OSDH is providing a list of Fit-Test Administrators for your convenience.

[Fit Test Administrator List](#)

Do you have MDS questions?
Contact the QIES Help Desk at (405) 271-5278
or MDShelp@health.ok.gov

Your Oklahoma QIES Help Desk team -

Diane Henry, State RAI Coordinator
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