



VRSA RESPIRATORY GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On March 11, 2020, the United States recognized the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration as COVID-19 as a pandemic. Recommendations of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) included a recommendation of utilizing face masks such as the N95 as a means to reduce and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

These recommendations have led to additional questions, including:

- What is required of employers if employees are mandated to wear N95 masks?
- What is required if employers deem it voluntary for employees to utilize N95 masks?

OSHA addressed these concerns in a [guidance document on April 3, 2020](#).

For employees with healthcare workers, those workers have been provided guidance stating that due to the shortage of N95 masks, employers may forego the annual fit testing, and they may utilize respirators beyond the manufacturer's recommended shelf life.

For employers with employees who are not healthcare workers, the [29 CFR 1910.134](#) standard is still in effect. This means that if you have employees who are not healthcare workers and you require them to utilize respiratory protection (including N95 masks), you still must conduct a medical evaluation, fit testing, training, and have a written program.

Employers have an option of making the use of N95's voluntary.

If employees utilize the N95 or any other respirator voluntarily, the requirements are reduced. For voluntary purposes, the employer needs to ensure that the employee signs an Appendix D for voluntary use (Your VRSA Safety Consultant can assist with Appendix D).

If the respirator is form fitting, the employer must also ensure that the medical evaluation questionnaire is completed.

For more information, resources, and guidance assistance, please feel free to utilize VRSA resources, VRSA Safety Consultants, OSHA, and Virginia Department of Labor and Industry guidances.