Voluntary N95 Respirator Use
4 Easy Steps to be Safe & Compliant

Assess the Hazard.

Sometimes employees may request to wear an N95 respirator for additional comfort or protection from a workplace hazard. Before allowing voluntary use, you need to determine what the hazard is and make sure employees are not exposed to something that makes respirator use a requirement according to Cal/OSHA regulations. The N95 respirators filter dusts and other small particulates out of the air. They do not protect against gases or solvent vapors, and should never be used in oxygen-deficient areas.

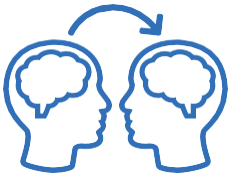
Make Sure It's Safe.

You need to make sure the respirator itself will not create a hazard for the employee. Respirators require you to breathe harder to force air through the filter, putting additional strain on the heart and lungs. This extra breathing work can increase the risk of heat illness when temperatures rise. Advise employees to talk to their doctor before wearing a respirator. Respirators must be kept clean and sanitary to prevent the inhalation of workplace contaminants that could make their way onto the inside of a dirty respirator.

Pass Around Appendix D.

Respirator use in the workplace is highly regulated, even when it's voluntary. Provide employees who voluntarily use N95 respirators with Appendix D of Cal/OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard, section 5144. Be sure to answer any questions your employees may have, and document they have received a copy. Some hazards, like wildfire smoke or COVID-19, have additional requirements for providing respirators for voluntary use. Use the search function on Cal/OSHA's website to learn more about what regulations may apply.

Train. Train. Train.



Anytime employees are using PPE, you need to make sure they are using it correctly. Review the manufacturer's instructions with employees to be sure they understand how to put on their N95, how to adjust it, how to perform a user seal check, and when to dispose. Employees should know they will get the most protection when the N95 seals tightly to a clean-shaven face. Inform employees to immediately report any chest pain or difficulty breathing when using an N95. Be sure to document your training.

This guidance applies only to voluntary use of disposable, filtering facepiece N95 respirators. Additional requirements apply to voluntary use of other types of respirators, such as half masks.

(Rev. 8/26)

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