

Respiratory Protection During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Best Practices for the Agricultural Community

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic has led to a high demand for all types of respirators and other personal protective equipment (PPE). Despite the current shortage, farmers and agricultural workers still need respiratory protection for many tasks in agriculture. Consider the following tips for conserving your respirator inventory while supplies are limited.

KEY POINTS

- To conserve respirator supplies, disposable respirators (such as N95s) can be reused by the same person, in a limited fashion.
- Reusable respirators (such as half-facepiece respirators) can be reused after proper cleaning and sanitizing.
- Cloth face coverings are not an acceptable replacement for respirators that protect you from workplace respiratory hazards. They only protect people around you from large droplets you exhale that may contain COVID-19.
- Document any changes you make to respiratory protection for you and/or your employees, including changes in types of respirators used and employee training.
- When available, disposable (N95) and reusable respirators provide adequate protection against COVID-19.

CONSERVING RESPIRATOR SUPPLIES: GUIDANCE ON REUSE

Two-Strap Disposable Respirator: N95, N100, P100 (Filtering Facepiece Respirator)

Reuse of two-strap disposable respirators is not recommended practice, but in a time of limited availability, it may need to be considered. This type of respirator should only be reused within the guidelines below:

- A disposable respirator can be worn more than once, but it cannot be shared with another person.
- Store respirator in a clean, dry place between uses.
- Conduct [seal checks](#) each time you put on or adjust the respirator.
- Do not attempt to clean the respirator with disinfectants, wipes, soap and water, or an air compressor.
- Avoid putting on, taking off or adjusting the mask with contaminated hands. Wash your hands before and after adjusting or removal.
- Discontinue use and throw away when it is splashed on, becomes dirty, becomes difficult to breathe, or when a seal cannot be obtained.

If using for COVID-19 protection, tape exhalation valves shut. The valves release unfiltered air, reducing the respirators' effectiveness at preventing the spread of COVID-19.



N95 Filtering Facepiece Respirators



P95 Filtering Facepiece Respirator

Reusable Respirators: Half-Facepiece, Full-Facepiece and Powered Air Purifying Respirators (Elastomeric Respirator)

- Clean and sanitize the respirator after each use. This type of respirator can be shared only if it is [cleaned and sanitized properly](#).
- Store respirator in a clean, dry place between uses.
- Avoid putting on, taking off or adjusting the mask with contaminated hands. Wash your hands before and after adjusting or removing.
- Change P100 filters after 8 hours or 30 days whichever comes first. If there is a shortage, continue to wear the P100 filter until it becomes dirty or difficult to breathe comfortably.
- Change cartridges according to manufactures recommendations. If there is a shortage, change the cartridge when you can smell or taste what you are protecting yourself against.
- To prolong the life of the cartridge, add pre-filters to cartridges that don't have built-in pre-filters.
- Check and replace valves and head cradle as needed to ensure the respirator is in good working order.

For protection against COVID-19, reusable respirators should be worn with P95/P100 filters or pre-filters.



Half-Facepiece Respirator



Full-Facepiece Respirator



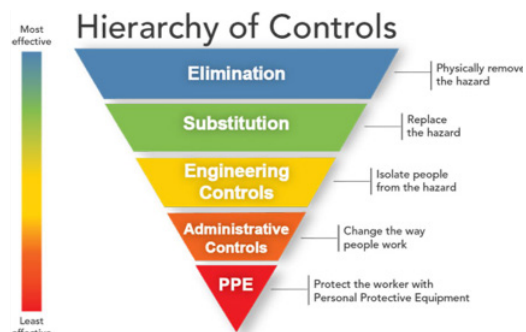
Powered Air Purifying Respirator

Respirator photos courtesy of 3M

WHAT ABOUT CLOTH FACE COVERINGS?

Cloth face coverings are NOT an acceptable replacement for a respirator at preventing exposure to respiratory hazards in the agricultural workplace. They should only be used as a means of infection control. In order to slow the spread of COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public setting where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (grocery stores, farm supply stores, machinery dealerships), especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. This practice may help people who have the virus and not know it from spreading it to others, but it does not provide you with protection from any other respiratory hazards or COVID-19. [Follow CDC guidance for cleaning and removing cloth face coverings.](#)

OTHER WAYS OF LIMITING RESPIRATORY EXPOSURES



Consider alternative controls that reduce exposure to respiratory hazards and thus reduce reliance on PPE. Examples include:

- Eliminate the process/task that creates hazardous dusts or gases.
- Use an alternative pesticide product that requires less PPE or the PPE that you have available.
- Ventilate and control dust at its source to reduce exposure in confined spaces.
- Hire an applicator or other contractor who has the required PPE.

When applying pesticides, the label is still the law. You must wear the PPE required by the product labels. If the label required respirator is not available, consider using a respirator that provides greater respiratory protection.

DOCUMENTING CHANGES IN RESPIRATORY PROTECTION PROCEDURES

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has advised for employers and agricultural businesses to document their “good faith efforts” to comply with the Respiratory Protection Standard. If you make any changes to procedures for using PPE, make sure to document:

- Efforts made to comply with the written standards;
- Attempts to eliminate the hazard or eliminate exposure;
- All changes to normal procedures (e.g. guidelines for reuse);
- Employee training on new procedures.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Respirator Selection Guide - AgriSafe Network](#)
- [Respirator Selection Worksheet – Ag Health & Safety Alliance](#)
- [Video: Respirator Seal Check – Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health](#)
- [Elastomeric Respirators: Strategies During Conventional and Surge Demand Situations - CDC](#)
- [Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19 - CDC](#)
- [Enforcement Guidance for Respiratory Protection Equipment During the COVID-19 Pandemic \(CDC\)](#)

WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM COVID-19

- Wash your hands often. If you soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with others. Stay at least 6 feet away from others.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of the elbow.
- When going in public wear a cloth face covering, or N95 if available.
- Shelter in place as directed by your state or local government.
- If you are sick, stay at home.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily.

The Coronavirus crisis is evolving quickly. Visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) for updates and current recommendations.