

Respirator and Medical Mask Guidance

Recent evidence indicates that the COVID-19 virus and specifically the Omicron variant is highly transmissible via inhalation of aerosols. As a result, recent public health recommendations have focused on selecting a mask that optimizes **fit** and **filtration** that can be worn correctly and comfortably to enhance current public health measures.

Respirators and Masks

N95 respirator – considered the gold standard of face coverings, and which ***requires fit testing to each individual***. At Carleton University, the provision of N95 respirators will remain restricted to those individuals or departments/services where there is a higher risk of infection from contact with infected individuals, or whose requirement for an N95 has been confirmed based on other factors.

- Examples would include: Health and Counselling Services, Housing*, Campus Safety Services * and the Central Heating Plant team of FMP
- Some specific research activities require the use of N95 respirators for safety, not related to COVID-19. EHS will assist with these determinations.

KN95 mask - closely related in design, but is not fit tested.

Medical Grade surgical masks – While not related by design to the KN95, the Level 3 medical masks have achieved filtration efficiency comparable to the above.

Consult the purchasing guidelines for information on availability and procurement

Regardless of the model chosen, a proper fit is essential.

A proper-fitting Level 3 medical mask is MORE protective than an ill-fitting N95 or KN95.

Guidelines

While fit testing is not required for the use of KN95s and medical masks it is important that it fits properly. The following are ways to ensure a snug fit.

- Check the edges of your mask for air leaks and adjust so that it is snug and has no gaps.
- Adjust the ties, bands or ear loops.
- Adjust the nosepiece.
- With Medical masks, layering with a well fitting cloth mask over top may help with fit

Handling

Strictly speaking, N95s, KN95s and medical masks are one time use, but given the current climate, a disposable mask can be worn multiple times. When storing your respirator or surgical mask between use, avoid deforming them and do not store them in plastic as mold can develop if they are unable to dry properly.

All three must be discarded and replaced if damaged, dirty or wet. If worn for long periods, respirator filters can load and breathing may become increasingly difficult. The respirator should be changed.