



COVID-19: Fit testing face masks

Purpose

This guidance is for fire and rescue (FRS) staff Fit testing face masks to avoid transmission during the coronavirus outbreak.

This guidance covers the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) when face fit testing takes place. If a risk assessment indicates, appropriate PPE must be worn when a face fit test is undertaken, or having contact with the body.

Strategic Intent

To 'Delay' and 'Mitigate' the impact of COVID-19 across the UK in order to protect our communities. The National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) strategic intentions are:

- To proactively protect our communities and limit the spread of COVID-19
- To ensure the safety and wellbeing of our staff in the pursuance of their duties
- To ensure that the sector's response is coordinated and integrated with other responding agencies, and promotes shared situational awareness and joint understanding of risk.

Respiratory protective equipment

Tight-fitting respirators (such as disposable FFP3 masks and reusable half masks) rely on having a good seal with the wearer's face. A face fit test should be carried out to ensure the respiratory protective equipment (RPE) can protect the wearer.

To ensure you put on tight-fitting RPE correctly, use a mirror or ask a colleague. Fit-testers should follow [government advice on social distancing](#), as they can make observations from this distance and deliver any instructions verbally. The user should then carry out a pre-use seal check or fit check.

Fitting the face mask

To minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 during face-fit testing the following additional measures should be taken:

- fit-testers should follow [government advice on social distancing](#) as they can make observations from this distance and deliver any instructions verbally
- those being fitted should keep their respirators on if closer observation is required to minimise risk to testers
- both the fit tester and those being fit tested should wash their hands before and after the test in accordance with PHE guidance on hand hygiene

- those being fit tested with non-disposable masks should clean the mask themselves before and immediately after the test using a suitable disinfectant cleaning wipe (check with manufacturer to avoid damaging the mask) * [see decontamination below](#)
- fit testers should wear nitrile gloves when undertaking cleaning of the tubes, hoods etc and ensure they remove gloves [following the correct procedure \(PDF\) - Portable Document Format](#)
- immediately dispose of used gloves, disposable masks, cleaning wipes etc in a waste bin

Fit testers should familiarise themselves with the following potential contact points and actions to minimise transmission:

Contact points	Action to minimise transmission
Inside and outside of respirator (mask)	The wearer should clean the inside and outside of the mask using a suitable disinfectant cleaning wipe under the fit tester's instruction and supervision.
Inside and outside (where held) of hood used for qualitative fit tests	The fit tester should clean the inside and outside (where held) of the hood between each test using a suitable disinfectant wipe that won't damage the visor and wearing disposable gloves.
Moisture from the wearer's breath collected inside the ambient particle counting device tubing (i.e. for quantitative testing)	Only touch used tubing when wearing gloves. Clean the mask end of the tube with a suitable disinfectant wipe after use. Have a stock of spare tubes (to allow used tubes to dry); or ensure the end of used tubing is placed in a wad of tissue if removing the condensate between tests by blowing out with compressed/canned air.
Fit testing adaptors and sampling probe	Clean at the same time as cleaning the mask following the fit test using a suitable disinfectant cleaning wipe, under the instruction and supervision of the fit tester.
Specific inner mask supplied by fit tester when fit testing powered RPE and the existing inner mask is replaced	This should be cleaned by the wearer at the same time as they clean the inside of the mask using a suitable disinfectant cleaning wipe following their fit test, under the instruction and supervision of the fit tester.
Filters	Although, the wearers exhaled air does not pass through the filters used when testing half and full facemasks, they may be re-used and handled between tests and so should be wiped using a suitable disinfectant cleaning wipe.

Further advice on fit testing

A fit test should be carried out before people wear RPE for the first time. Inadequate fit can reduce the protection provided and lead to immediate or long-term ill-health or can even put the RPE wearer's life in danger. A fit test should be repeated whenever there is a change to the RPE type, size, model or material or whenever there is a change to the circumstances of the wearer that could alter the fit of the RPE; for example:

- weight loss or gain
- substantial dental work
- any facial changes (scars, moles, effects of ageing etc) around the face seal area
- facial piercings
- introduction or change in other head-worn personal protective equipment (PPE)

There is no stipulated frequency for re-testing, and you don't need one if there are no changes in these circumstances.

Additional considerations

The descriptors above detail the actions required to minimise transmission when fitting RPE that is recommended by the NFCC in relation to COVID-19. This follows the most recent Health and safety executive (HSE) guidance pertinent to the COVID-19 pandemic. This guidance should be adopted by FRS staff as a minimum for the care of all RPE fitting; a dynamic risk assessment should be carried out to determine if a higher level or additional PPE is required.

Decontamination

As coronaviruses have a lipid envelope, a wide range of disinfectants are effective. PPE/RPE and good infection prevention and control precautions are effective at minimising risk but can never eliminate it.

If an alternative to disinfectant is used, the local Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPCT) should be consulted on to ensure that this is effective against enveloped viruses.

It is possible that these viruses can survive in the environment and so thorough environmental decontamination is vital.

Where less disposable means of PPE/Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) are utilised effective decontamination procedures should be adopted in line with current service procedures and extant guidance.

Recording Tests

Each FRS should follow their own procedures to record the progress of all face fit testing

Appendix A



Using disposable respirators

Pre-use checks

- You should be clean-shaven around the face seal to achieve an effective fit when using disposable respirators. Beards and stubble will stop the disposable respirator sealing to your face and protecting you properly
- Make sure it is the right disposable respirator for your work and for you - have you passed a face fit test in this disposable respirator?
- Make sure the disposable respirator is clean and undamaged before you use it
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for checking the disposable respirator and putting it on
- Check the fit every time you put on the disposable respirator to ensure there are no leaks

Putting the disposable respirator on and checking it fits

1 Cup the disposable respirator in one hand, with the straps hanging out of the way.

2 Hold the disposable respirator in place on your face.

3 Pull the bottom strap over your head, to the back of your neck.

4 Pull the top strap over your head to sit above your ears.

5 Check the straps are not twisted. If you need to tighten the straps, pull both ends at the same time, bottom first, then top.

6 If there is a nose clip, press this firmly to the shape of your nose.

7 Before entering the workplace, a user seal check should be carried out. This is done by placing your hands over the filter material and breathing in. The mask should suck down onto your face when you breathe in sharply. You should hold your breath for ten seconds and the disposable respirator should not loosen. If it does, you should readjust and repeat.

Check your disposable respirator before you put it on. Then do a pre-use seal check or fit check - for a proper seal each time: Clean shaven? Edges tight? Chin snug? Nose clip shaped? Straps in place?

This poster illustrates a typical disposable respirator, there are many other types available. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on putting your type of disposable respirator on and checking it fits.

Visit [hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment](https://www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment) for more information

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