

BILH Annual Fit Testing Program (Reusable and Disposable Respirators) Frequently Asked Questions for Staff

General

Why is BILH resuming annual fit testing efforts?

Annual fit testing is once again enforceable under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards. We will be conducting annual fit testing to both reusable and disposable respirators. Staff will bring their reusable respirators with them to their fit testing sessions for an annual fit test and filter cartridge exchange. To improve supply chain resiliency and work to move through product prior to expiration, we will be fit testing primarily to Halyard brand (duckbill) disposable respirators, even for staff previously fit tested to 3M brand disposable respirators.

Why is BILH fit testing to reusable respirators again this year?

Although the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) has improved, the general supply chain in the US remains unstable – similar to what you may experience with groceries and household goods. The focus on reusable respirators provides respiratory protection that is always available with no risk of interruption. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) are encouraging health care systems to incorporate reusable respirators into their facilities on a routine basis since they provide 95-100% filtration, are sustainable, and always available. A number of health care systems (including BILH) have shown them to be a good option during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who is included in this year's program?

Staff and physicians who meet the following criteria:

- Care for or enter rooms of patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19
- Care for or enter rooms of patients on airborne isolation (e.g. tuberculosis, measles, varicella)
- Enter a patient room during a [high risk](#) procedure
- Work in a clinical lab with mycobacterial specimens (e.g. microbiology, pathology)

Why can staff working in sterile areas wear a reusable respirator?

The CDC and NIOSH have approved the use of the MSA Advantage elastomeric respirator for use in sterile areas because it does not have an open exhalation valve. Exhalation valves permit exhaled air from the wearer to reach others. The lack of an exhalation valve in the MSA Advantage eliminates this risk. Healthcare personnel who were not fit tested in 2020 due to their work in a sterile environment can now be fit tested to an MSA respirator. Although we have added exhalation valve filters to the 3M elastomeric respirators, they are still not approved for routine use in sterile environments.

I was fit tested to a 3M elastomeric respirator or an envo®mask previously. Can I get an MSA Advantage respirator this year?

Please bring your current reusable respirator (3M elastomeric, envo®mask or MSA) with you to your annual fit testing session. We are happy to provide you with support, education and

supplies that should increase your comfort level with your reusable respirator. If you have never become comfortable with your current reusable respirator and have not been able to use it routinely when a respirator is needed, we can fit test you to an MSA Advantage respirator, if supply permits.

Can I bring my own respirator for use during work shifts?

No. BILH does not support the use of personally purchased PPE because the fit, filtration and durability cannot be verified. All BILH-provided PPE has been evaluated by BILH Environmental Health and Safety staff and many respirators have been sent to an outside laboratory for additional testing. Counterfeit respirators are common in the current marketplace and are not safe for use. Although staff may own a similar brand of respirator to the one that BILH will provide, they may not use them in a BILH facility due to safety and quality concerns. Staff who have purchased their own respirator will be provided a new respirator at the time of fit testing.

Why does BILH expect staff who meet the appropriate criteria for a reusable respirator to use it as their primary respirator instead of a disposable respirator?

BILH is committed to providing appropriate, safe PPE for all our staff. Reusable respirators provide safe protection, can be easily cleaned, and are a sustainable choice as demand for disposable respirators remains high and the supply chain is unstable. Using your reusable respirator versus disposable respirators also helps to decrease waste created by PPE, contributing to a greener environment.

Staff members who were successfully fit tested to an envo@mask or a 3M elastomeric respirator should use it as their primary respirator in non-sterile environments (not an operating room or cardiac catheterization lab). Staff members who are successfully fit tested to an MSA Advantage respirator can use it as their primary respirator in both sterile and non-sterile environments

Why does the 3M elastomeric respirator packaging state that it is completely latex-free but the MSA Advantage respirator packaging does not?

This MSA Advantage respirator is not labeled as completely latex-free but after review of the mask components with the manufacturer and BILH Allergy, we are not concerned about potential allergic reactions. If you have any concerns, you can be fit tested to an alternative respirator.

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Session Logistics

What can I expect at the annual fit testing sessions this year?

	Reusable Respirators	Disposable Respirators
What will I be fit tested to?	<p>Please bring your current reusable respirator.</p> <p>If you have never been fit tested to a reusable respirator you may be fit tested to an MSA Advantage Respirator.</p>	<p>Primary: Halyard (duckbill) N95 model</p>
What will I be receiving?	Replacement filters/cartridges and a mini education session.	Mini education session.
What should I bring?	Your reusable respirator and your phone (to take a picture of fit test form for your records).	
How long will the session take?	Approximately 15 minutes, but please allow for additional time as there may be a wait.	
Can I eat or drink 15 minutes before my session?	Water only, please.	

Will fit testing supplies be disinfected during the fit testing process?

Yes, appropriate disinfection of all supplies will be performed between individuals using hospital-approved germicidal wipes. These supplies include fit testing hoods, nebulizers, and laminated educational sheets.

What happens to the reusable respirators after an unsuccessful fit test?

Reusable respirators that fail a fit test with a particular individual will be sent for disinfection per the manufacturer's instructions and returned to general supply. Any exposed filters will be discarded.

Supplies

Is BILH experiencing a shortage of disposable respirators?

No, we are not currently experiencing a shortage of disposable respirators, but the overall supply chain is not stable enough to ensure that the brands used at BILH will consistently be available. We can currently ensure availability of the Halyard (duckbill) brand N95 respirators and for this reason, we will be fit testing primarily to this disposable respirator. We are managing our inventory and ongoing product supply chain in a way that both meets current usage demands and allows us to be prepared for increased needs created by another possible surge of COVID-19 cases. The use of both reusable and disposable respirators allows us to optimize the utilization of our supply.

Where can I receive a new respirator?

If you are getting fit tested to a reusable respirator for the first time, you should attend one of the annual fit testing sessions at your institution. If you miss that session for any reason, contact

your manager, who will coordinate with their local employee health and supply chain leader since respirator distribution is unique to each hospital.

Where can I receive additional supplies for use with respirators (e.g., 3-D printed ear protectors, filters)?

Staff needing additional supplies for their respirators should contact their manager, who will coordinate with their local supply chain leader. BILH Supply Chain continues to monitor the inventory and purchase respirator supplies. Staff are advised to obtain supplies through BILH and not to purchase them on their own.

How often do I need to change reusable respirator filters?

Envo®masks filters should be changed after one shift/day. Elastomeric respirator filters (3M and MSA Advantage) should be changed annually; this will be performed along with a quick refresher on use at the annual fit testing sessions at your institution. If a filter becomes soiled, torn or wet at any time, it should be discarded and replaced. Please see [BILH Respirator Service Life by Respirator Type](#) for details.

Additional PPE to Wear with a Reusable Respirator

Do I need to wear a surgical mask over my reusable respirator?

Some staff will still need to wear a surgical mask over their reusable respirator.

- **Envo®masks** have an exhalation valve and do require a covering surgical mask.
- **3M elastomeric respirators** will be fitted with an exhalation valve filter during your annual fit testing session (if one is not already in place) and then will no longer require a covering surgical mask.
- **MSA Advantage respirators** do not have an exhalation valve and therefore no surgical mask covering is required.

Education

Where can I find a training refresher on how to use a reusable respirator?

All staff previously fit tested to a reusable respirator will receive a brief educational refresher at annual fit testing sessions. Staff newly fit tested for a MSA Advantage elastomeric respirator will be trained how to use them as part of fit testing. If you need more information talk to your manager or review training materials on the [BILH COVID-19 Staff Resources website](#) under the [Clinical Resources](#) in the BILH Reusable Respirator. Fit Testing and Training Materials section.

Respirator Care and Maintenance

How should the reusable respirators be cleaned?

Reusable respirators are considered a piece of BILH-issued personal property, similar to a pager or an ID badge. They should be cleaned by the individual owner following institutional guidelines and stored appropriately on-site. Education on disassembly, reassembly and disinfection will be provided as part of this fit test program and is also available on the [BILH COVID-19 website](#) in the Personal Protective Equipment Guidance section. Click [here](#) to watch a video on how to incorporate your reusable respirator into your workflow.

Please note that BILH performed a risk assessment, including input from multiple BILH departments and national guidance, to develop the cleaning and disinfection guidance for

reusable respirators. While our guidance may differ slightly from the manufacturer's instructions for use, we are confident it is a safe and effective practice for healthcare workers to clean and disinfect their own reusable respirators with hospital-approved germicidal wipes. Inspecting your respirator for integrity is important prior to each use, as any product not specifically recommended by the manufacturer (or containing alcohol) could potentially lead to damage of the facepiece. If any piece of your respirator is not in good working order upon inspection, please do not use and reach out for replacement parts.

What if there is moisture building up in my MSA respirator after prolonged periods of wear?

Due to the lack of an exhalation valve, users of the MSA Advantage respirators, may experience moisture build up inside their respirators during normal use. You may choose to remove your respirator periodically and wipe the moisture out followed by cleaning and disinfection for comfort and to ensure a good seal.

Am I responsible for parts for my reusable respirator, if something breaks or wears out?

No, extra straps, exhalation valves, filter cartridges and filters are available through your institution's distribution department. Please reach out to your manager, if you need a part for your reusable respirator. It is your responsibility, however, to inspect your respirator prior to each use for signs of poor integrity and to address any issues with replacement parts (or a replacement respirator, if needed).

What happens if I lose my reusable respirator?

Reusable respirators are BILH-issued personal property. If lost, please contact your manager. While BILH purchased a large number of these respirators, they are a valuable resource and we ask that you treat them with care.