

Reusable Respirators (MSA and 3M Elastomeric Respirators, and envo®masks) Frequently Asked Questions for Staff

General

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 the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who is included in this year's reusable respirator program?

Staff and physicians working in any setting who meet the following criteria:

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

Is this program the same as annual fit testing?

No. This year's program focuses only on reusable respirators, while traditional annual fit testing focused on disposable respirators. Staff who are required to wear respirators as part of their job will participate in this program. Those who were previously fit tested in the BILH 2020 Fit Testing Program will participate in a Respirator Check in and those who were not eligible for reusable respirators through last year's program will now be fit tested to a reusable respirator. However, all staff are still required by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to have annual education on the Respiratory Protection Program, which will be provided by each BILH hospital/business until following completion of fit testing.

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

The CDC and NIOSH have approved the use of the new MSA Advantage 290 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 will be fit tested to the MSA Advantage respirator this year. Although we will be adding an exhalation valve filter to the 3M elastomeric respirators, they are still not approved for routine use in sterile environments.

Why is BILH adding another brand of reusable respirator when we already have envo[®]masks and 3M elastomeric respirators?

The CDC and NIOSH recommend using reusable respirators in the health care setting to augment the total supply of respirators available, in both crisis and routine situations. BILH has been selected by NIOSH to participate in a national project to further expand our supply of reusable respirators. The new respirators do not have an open exhalation valve and do not require a covering surgical mask, which makes them easier to use and able to be worn in both sterile environments (like the operating room or cardiac cath lab) and non-sterile environments.

Can I get a different reusable respirator instead of an MSA Advantage elastomeric respirator?

No. This year we are preferentially fit testing staff to the MSA Advantage elastomeric respirator, with the 3M elastomeric respirator as a backup option in the event of an unsuccessful fit test to an MSA respirator. The MSA Advantage does not have an exhalation valve and can be used in both sterile and non-sterile environments without a covering surgical mask. The majority of staff participating who will be newly fit tested to a reusable respirator work in sterile environments, where other reusable respirators are not approved for use. We will continue to support staff who were previously fit tested to an envo[®]mask or a 3M elastomeric respirator and provide the appropriate supplies needed to maintain them.

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

Please bring your current reusable respirator (3M elastomeric or envo[®]mask) with you to the Reusable Respirator Program 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.

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 290 respirator packaging does not?

This MSA Advantage 290 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.

Session Logistics

What is the difference between a Respirator Check in and a Fit Test to a reusable respirator?

	Fit Test	Respirator Check In
Which part of the session should I attend?	Never fit tested to a reusable respirator at a BILH facility	Fit tested to a reusable respirator at a BILH facility since Oct. 2020
Which respirators are included?	MSA Advantage 290 [®]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3M Elastomeric respirator • Envo[®]mask
What is included in my Reusable Respirator Session?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fit test with seal check • Education • New PPE bag! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filter cartridge change (3M) or filter pick up (envo[®]mask) • Exhalation valve filter (3M) • Seal check • Education • New PPE bag!
What should I bring?	Your phone (to take a picture of your fit test form)	Your reusable respirator
How long will a fit test or respirator check in take?	15 minutes (Please account for additional time, as there may be a wait during peak time)	15 minutes (Please account for additional time, as there may be a wait during peak time)

Can I eat or drink 15 minutes before my session?	Water only	Water only
---	------------	------------

How long will a fit test or a respirator check in take?

On average, the process will take 15 minutes. Note that staff should account for additional time, as there may be a wait during peak hours. We appreciate staff's patience with this process.

Will fit testing areas have physical distancing protocols in place?

Yes, safety is our top priority throughout this process. Each institution has designated an operations leader who is working with the fit test vendor Triumvirate and local infection control and facilities individuals to ensure physical distancing. Due to high level of vaccination among our employees and required daily symptom attestations, physical distancing of 3 feet may be maintained to allow for adequate throughput during the fit testing sessions. Additional air filtration with portable HEPA filters will be provided when deemed necessary by institutional Infection Control and Facilities.

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, laminated educational sheets, clipboards, and pens.

What happens to the 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. This is similar to what you may experience with groceries and household goods. 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 in 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 BILH 2021-22 Reusable Respirator Program sessions at your institution. If you miss that session for any reason, contact your manager, who will coordinate with their local 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[®]mask filters should be changed after one shift/day. Elastomeric respirator filters (3M elastomeric and MSA Advantage) should be changed annually; this will be performed along with a quick refresher on use at the BILH 2021-22 Reusable Respirator Program 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.

Do staff need to obtain their own supplies (i.e. hoods, nebulizers, respirators) for fit testing?

No. Operational leaders at each BILH organization will work with BILH Supply Chain to obtain necessary supplies.

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 the BILH 2021-22 Reusable Respirator program sessions, 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.

Can an exhalation plug be used for the envo[®]mask?

Exhalation valve plugs should not be utilized at this time. NIOSH is in the process of testing the safety and efficacy of exhalation valve plugs for the protection of those around you. For now, you should cover your envo[®]mask with a surgical mask.

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 Reusable Respirator Program sessions. Staff newly fit tested to a MSA Advantage 290[®] 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 Program, 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. Please note that BILH has 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 respirator 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 period of wear?

Due to the lack of an exhalation valve, users of the MSA Advantage 290 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.