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POLICY ON N95 RESPIRATOR FIT TESTING, FIT/SEAL CHECKING, AND OTHER RESPIRATOR ISSUES DURING COVID-19

Summary of June 24, 2020 changes:

- Merged with “Fit check and fit testing of N95 Respirators” (approved March 23, 2020) policy; now retired
- Incorporated non-hospital issued N95 respirator policy, now retired
- Linked to MGB N95 Models a reference table

Background

Conservation of N95 respirators is a critical necessity in light of national supply chain constraints triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has determined that while institutions must make a good faith effort to comply with 29 CFR § 1910.134, suspension of annual repeat fit-testing is permitted to preserve and prioritize the supply of respirators for clinical use. In addition, there is a national shortage of fit testing kits limiting the feasibility of widespread fit testing.

OSHA and CDC recommend that providers perform a seal check (i.e. a fit check) every time a N95 respirator is donned to ensure that the respirator fits and is appropriately seated on the face creating a seal.

Fit-Testing

Given the critical shortage of N95 respirators, need for rapid deployment of new models of N95 respirators across MGB institutions, and fit test kit supply shortages, fit testing, when available, will be prioritized for providers who need to perform aerosol generating procedures in COVID positive patients and who have never been fit tested before. In order to support fit-testing of employees and new hires to N95 respirators, MGB institutions may implement their own fit-test solution.

When transitioning to alternative N95 respirators, staff should be prioritized in the following order, for fit-testing as fit-test supplies are available:

1. Emergency Department, Anesthesia or other clinical groups performing or required to be present during endotracheal intubations

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2. Critical care clinicians (MD, RT, RN)
3. Clinicians caring for suspected or confirmed COVID patients
4. Other staff interacting with the patient environment (ESD, USAs)
5. Clinicians in COVID testing sites performing NP swabs
6. Clinicians and support staff in other patient care areas

User Fit-Check and Seal-Checks
Employees should refer to the manufacturer’s instructions for conducting user seal checks on any specific respirator (also found here). This information can be found on the box or individual respirator packaging. If fit check cannot achieve a proper seal due to air leakage, an employee may need a different respirator model or size. If no such respirator can be identified, the employee must utilize a Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) for respiratory protection when airborne or enhanced respiratory isolation precautions are needed. The clinical care team should inform their supervisor if the integrity and/or fit of their N95 filtering facepiece respirator is compromised.

Other Considerations
Alternative N95 respirators
During the current COVID-19 pandemic and response the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) on March 2, 2020 to allow NIOSH approved N95 FFRs to be used in healthcare settings, even if they were not distributed, marketed or labeled for medical use and to use expired products. As MGB institutions or areas within institutions are transitioned to alternative N95 respirators it is important to understand the appropriate use of these products within a healthcare setting. N95 respirators with exhalation valves are not permitted to be used as they do not provide source control.

Surgical N95 respirators
End users need to be aware of whether or not the N95 respirator they have is approved as a surgical mask as well. A surgical mask should be worn over an N95 Respirator if a sterile procedure is to be performed or if there is a high risk of splashes, if that respirator is not also approved as a surgical mask. The MGB N95 Models document provides a comprehensive listing of the products in circulation and inbound across the system. Employees should reference this document to understand the specifics of the respirator that they have been fitted to. The full hyperlink to the reference grid is here.

Use of non-hospital issued N95 respirators
The use of non hospital-approved N95 respirators is not permitted.

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