

TOOLBOX TALK #17

RESPIRATORY PROTECTION AND COVID

During the pandemic, a topic that has been brought to everyone's attention and raised some important issues is respiratory protection. COVID-19 being a respiratory illness has highlighted the significance of protecting our respiratory system to save lives. From this,



many lessons have been learned. Three key ones are being prepared at work, seeking better alternative protection and the importance of American made products.

Respirator demand globally has skyrocketed, diminishing stock worldwide. For the general public, surgical and N95 masks have been needed to protect people in their daily lives. However, this has impacted workers who require this PPE for their occupation. Workers at hospitals – arguably one of the most essential services – have had to wear disposable respirators for entire shifts before changing them, increasing the likelihood of spreading infection as the respirators become ineffective and contaminated.

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The transmission of infection, along with the reduced ability to source respirators, has pushed people to seek better alternatives. Because the spread of infection can occur via direct or indirect aerosolization of the virus entering either the respiratory system or through moisture in the eyes, people are reconsidering the protection gained from conventional N95 masks and looking for alternatives that cover the entire face.

One type of respirator that has been instrumental in facilitating that change is a loose-fitting respirator. Unlike masks, these use positive pressure, letting users breathe as they would normally, reducing the demand on the lungs when compared to negative-pressure respirators. They also provide a far greater level of respiratory protection and comfort than masks. With a longer life cycle for these products, financial benefits include reduced consumable costs.

Lastly, buy American-made. With borders closed, non-essential businesses shutting down and strained international shipping services, sourcing products and materials from outside the United States is proving difficult. Buying American made means faster lead times, economic growth and more jobs for Americans.

Note: The information listed above may not reflect current protocols. Please visit the CDC's website for current practices and procedures due to COVID-19.