**Guidance on PPE (cleaning respirators) during COVID-19**

**Overview**
This is not a legal document and employers are advised to seek legal advice.

Employers and constructors have obligations to protect workers from hazards in the workplace as set out in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations and the directives coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Workers should raise any concerns to their:
- Supervisor
- Joint health and safety committee
- Health and safety representative

This will help ensure the employer has taken all reasonable precautions.

Ontario is currently in the midst of a global pandemic. While the COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly, the legislation and regulations used to govern Ontario’s workplaces are not.

Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to keep workers and work sites safe and free of hazards. Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work. If health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can seek enforcement by filing a complaint with the ministry’s Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008. Failure of the employer or constructor to comply with the OHSA and its regulations could result in a stop-work order upon inspection by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

**Recognize hazards and assess risks**

*How does the coronavirus COVID-19 spread?* The virus typically spreads from person to person through coughing and sneezing, close contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then the mouth, nose, or eyes with unwashed hands.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a respirator can help prevent the spread of this virus. Workers may be required to wear a respirator as part of the company’s policy and procedures or as part of the controls from a job safety analysis (JSA) for the jobsite. Proper cleaning procedures must be followed to maintain the effectiveness of respirators.

If an employer requires workers to wear a respirator, the employer must have a respiratory protection program in place (O. Reg. 833, s. 9). This program must include instruction and training for cleaning and disinfecting the respirator.

For more information visit [ihsa.ca/COVID-19](https://ihsa.ca/COVID-19)
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Controls
Proper cleaning, sanitizing, and/or disinfecting

It may be necessary to re-use elastomeric half-facepiece respirators or full-facepiece respirators to prevent transmission of microorganisms/coronaviruses to personnel. It is imperative you start with washing/sanitizing your hands prior to donning/doffing as well as during cleaning your respirator to avoid anything being transferred to your face or respirator.

Ensure that all workers have been trained on the proper procedures for cleaning and disinfecting respirators. An adequate supply of cleaning and disinfecting products should be made available for the sanitization of respirators.

Consider using the following general cleaning tips, which are included in the 3M Technical Bulletin referenced below:

• Cleaning is recommended after each use. Nitrile or vinyl gloves, as well as other PPE as indicated, should be worn during cleaning.
• Remove any filters or cartridges and discard them if applicable. Some respirators have a hard plastic case surrounding the filter media. These hard surfaces should be wiped down with a disinfectant. Facepieces may be further disassembled as necessary.
• As per the manufacturer’s instructions, inspect facepieces to identify any damage or excessive wear. Repair or replace facepieces as necessary.
• Clean facepieces (excluding filters or cartridges) by immersing them in a warm cleaning solution and scrubbing them with a soft brush. Water temperature is not to exceed 120°F (49°C). Add neutral detergent if necessary. Do not use cleaners containing lanolin or other oils.
• Disinfect facepieces by soaking them according to the user instructions for the disinfectant being used.
• Rinse facepieces thoroughly with fresh, warm water.
• Air-dry facepieces in a non-contaminated area.
• Inspect and reassemble respirators as described in the user instructions.
• Wash or use disinfectant wipes to clean hands before putting respirator back on when returning from break or lunch.

NOTE: Respirator components may become damaged over time with prolonged or extended use of disinfecting products.

Proper use and application
• Follow the limitations of the respirator as per the manufacturer’s instructions.
• Ensure proper fitting of the respirator as per the manufacturer’s instructions.
• Ensure workers are following the proper policies and procedures for cleaning, maintenance, and use.
• Perform regular inspection and maintenance of the respirator. In the case of an air-purifying respirator, check for end-of-service-life indicators and establish change-out schedules for cartridges, canisters, or filters (pre- and post-use).

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**Evaluate**
Follow-up and evaluation are essential to ensure the effectiveness of controls and solutions that have been implemented.

- Use knowledge-based questions to confirm that workers understand the use, care, and cleaning procedures.
- Review your process regularly to identify any opportunities for improvement and to determine if:
  - All workers have been trained on cleaning and disinfection procedures.
  - Workers are donning/doffing and wearing their respirator correctly.
  - Workers have the opportunity to express any questions or concerns about the use of their respirator, and that their questions are answered.
  - Cleaning and disinfection supplies are adequate and available.
- Monitor the workers to ensure they are following the procedure to clean and disinfect the respirator.
- Continuously engage with your workers by communicating recommendations and adjustments with supervisors.
- Continuously monitor the necessary tools, supplies, and equipment needed to meet your control measures and ensure that sufficient supplies are readily available, adequate, and accessible.
- Monitor your health and the health of your workers for symptoms such as for cough, fever, or difficulty breathing. Refer to the Government of Canada Guidelines for more info.

If you are concerned that you may have been exposed to COVID-19, visit the Ministry of Health website and take the **self-assessment**. If you are experiencing symptoms, contact your primary care provider or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000. Do not visit a COVID-19 assessment centre unless you have been referred by a health care professional. Do not call 911 unless it is an emergency.

**Resources**
Stay updated with daily government updates on COVID-19:
- Government of Ontario
- Government of Canada
- Public Health Ontario

References:
- Cleaning and disinfecting 3M reusable elastomeric half and full facepiece respirators following potential exposure to coronaviruses (3M Technical Bulletin, January 2020)
- Respiratory protection (Ch. 15 in IHSA’s Construction Health and Safety Manual)