



Respirators vs. Masks, and the role of Filtrete™ Air Quality Solutions



Learn what 3M and Filtrete™ Brand are doing to help during the COVID-19 outbreak, discover the difference between N95 respirators and face masks, and what you can do to help protect yourself and others.

Across the globe, people are doing what they can to help support healthcare workers amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Recognizing that we're in this together, 3M and Filtrete™ Brand are doing all we can to assist those on the front lines, as well as the general public staying at home.

How 3M is Supporting Healthcare Workers

With requests from heroic nurses, doctors and first responders for the respirators and other equipment they desperately need, 3M is doing all we can to help fight the spread of COVID-19 by supporting them. Since the pandemic began, we've ramped up production of N95 and other filtering facepiece respirators to maximum levels and doubled our global output to a rate of more than 1.1 billion per year, or nearly 100 million per month. There are already plans in place to expand this capacity even further in the months ahead.

In the United States, we are producing 35 million respirators per month—and working in close partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and 3M authorized distributors to deliver them to the front-line workers and geographic areas with the greatest need. We are also working with the government to import 166.5 million additional respirators to further increase the U.S. supply. A key component in these actions is empowering our distribution network to deliver respirators faster than ever before.

While respirators remain the most visible component in 3M's efforts to support the pandemic response, we're also maximizing production of a wide range of other products used in the COVID-19 response globally. These include hand sanitizers, disinfectants and filtration solutions to help the pharmaceutical industry develop a vaccine to fight the virus.

The Difference Between N95 Respirators and Face Masks

Proper respiratory protection requires that respirators filter very fine particles—including those so small you can't see them—and provides a tight fitted seal around your face. Respirators with an N95 filtration efficiency rating have the ability when properly selected and worn to filter at least 95% of non-oily airborne particulate hazards. Surgical masks, on the other hand, don't provide the same filtration performance and don't form a tight seal around the face. They are intended to help reduce the wearer from spreading their own biological particles (e.g., viruses and bacteria) and help reduce the chances of infecting others. This is why they are provided to hospital patients when available.

For these reasons, N95 respirators are recommended for healthcare workers and first responders on the front lines of the pandemic, who may be exposed to biological particles in much higher concentrations than the general public. The current U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance to wear face coverings doesn't refer to N95 respirators or surgical masks, which should both be reserved for critical use.

When and Where to Wear a Homemade Face Mask

You may see that people around you or on social media are making homemade face masks or using face coverings, such as bandanas. While homemade masks should not be used to provide respiratory protection, they may serve other purposes.



A homemade mask may help wearers remember not to touch their nose and mouth, and it may help contain spit or phlegm expelled by the wearer, similar to covering a cough or sneeze with a face tissue.



The CDC recommends “wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies), especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.” It also notes that these suggested cloth face coverings are not surgical masks or N95 respirators, which it asks the general public to reserve for healthcare workers and medical first responders. The CDC’s full guidelines on face masks can be found [here](#).

It’s important to note that homemade face masks don’t meet all the requirements of government-approved respiratory protection and don’t always effectively reduce potential exposure. And perhaps most crucial to remember: Masks shouldn’t be used as an excuse to go against social-distancing guidelines.

Maintaining Cleaner Air While Spending More Time at Home

Filtrete™ Filters do not stop coronavirus, but they do improve indoor air quality. As we practice social distancing and are quarantined indoors, it’s especially important to help maintain a healthier home environment.

Our electrostatic filters improve indoor air quality by pulling in and capturing unwanted airborne particles. These can include viruses, bacteria, mold spores and pollen. Filtrete™ HVAC Filters MPR 1500 and above, including our [Smart Air Filters](#), can capture at least 54% of the smallest airborne particles, like bacteria and particles that carry viruses*—helping to keep indoor air cleaner and fresher. When choosing the right filter, know the higher the MPR, the more effective the filter is at reducing unwanted airborne particles without harming your HVAC system.

Keep in mind, you need to change your filter at least every 90 days for optimal performance. After removing your filter, place it in a bag before disposing. Be sure to wash hands thoroughly after disposing.

*% captured is based on ASHRAE 52.2 testing for 0.3 to 1 micron particles from the air passing through the filter, which relates to HVAC industry standard efficiency testing



For information on the coronavirus and recommended protection products (including effective face pieces or respirators), please [consult the CDC](#).

Why You Shouldn’t Use Filtrete™ Filters to Make Homemade Masks

We do receive questions about Filtrete™ Filters and the filter material used in our products. 3M does not recommend or support the use of a Filtrete™ Filter to make a mask or respirator because:

- Filtrete™ Brand products are designed to be used in home HVAC systems.
- The filter material in a Filtrete™ Filter performs very differently than an approved N95 respirator or a mask.
- It cannot achieve the fit or performance of an N95 respirator or a mask.
- Modifying the furnace filter may damage the material and compromise the performance.

General Safety Recommendations

The [CDC recommends](#) some everyday things to help prevent getting sick and spreading illnesses:



Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially:

- after using the restroom
- before eating
- after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing



Avoid touching your face



Stay home when you’re sick



Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces with household cleaning supplies registered with the EPA



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue away



Use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol



Avoid close contact with people who are sick

