

Back to Work Safely Series: Construction

Returning to Work Safely in Construction

As many countries began to return to the workplace, companies may be considering additional requirements and steps to help protect workers from SARS-CoV-2 the virus which causes COVID-19. The virus is currently believed to spread from person to person, when an infected person's respiratory droplets, perhaps from coughing, sneezing or talking, land in others' eyes, nose or mouth. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that being within 6 ft (2m) for ≥15 minutes of an infected person's respiratory emissions increases others' chances of receiving enough virus to potentially be infected¹. Another possible route of infection, not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, includes contacting infected surfaces and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth may also help spread the disease².

Many internationally recognized organizations such as U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), World Health Organization (WHO), European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU OSHA) and CDC have also published updated guidance. The CDC and OSHA have created guidance specifically addressing the construction industry. Key points from the CDC guidance for construction include:

- Encourage sick workers to stay home
- Encourage workers who are well with sick family members to follow CDC precautions
- Limit close contact with other people
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects, including shared tools, machines, vehicles, ladders, portable toilets, etc.
- Limit tool sharing
- Practice proper hand hygiene
- Provide training on symptoms, risks for severe illness, and on proper handwashing
- Provide hand washing stations or hand sanitizer >60% alcohol
- Develop and implement a social distancing plan, to maintain at least 6 ft (2m) of separation
- Encourage the use of face coverings in addition to social distancing. Note these do not replace respiratory protection, where hazards dictate respirator use.

Additional engineering and administrative controls may include³:

- Install shields and barriers, where possible
- Restrict access or limit capacity in enclosed areas such as elevators, trailers, small spaces, shared vehicles, and break areas
- Modify work schedules to stagger trades, or minimize mixing of shifts
- Limit in person meetings, or ensure people can spread out 6 ft (2m) or more between attendees
- Conduct hazard assessments to determine any additional PPE required and provide the related training
- Install posters encouraging staying home if sick and demonstrating cough and sneeze etiquette and proper hand hygiene
- Designate a COVID-19 safety and health officer responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns
- Understand your site's local health requirements and levels of community outbreaks.

OSHA has provided additional guidance on exposure risk levels for COVID-19. In OSHA's "[Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID19](#)," a control banding approach is provided based on levels of risk exposure to SARS-CoV-2. Levels include Low,

Medium, High and Very High. OSHA anticipates that most construction work will be low or medium risk, with some opportunities for high risk tasks.

OSHA applied these risk categories in their [construction specific guidance](#). Low risks tasks include those that allow workers to maintain 6 ft (2m) of separation, and have little contact with customers, visitors, or the public. Medium risk tasks include tasks where workers may need to work within 6 ft(2m) of each other or have contact with visitors, customers or the public. High risk tasks include “entering an indoor work site occupied by people such as other workers, customers, or residents suspected of having or known to have COVID-19, including when an occupant of the site reports signs and symptoms consistent with COVID-19.” High risk activities could include work in hospitals with known or suspected cases of COVID-19. Very high risks involved in health care procedures are not likely to occur in construction.

For low risk tasks, OSHA recommends, “Most construction workers are unlikely to need PPE beyond what they use to protect themselves during routine job tasks. Such PPE may include a hard hat, gloves, safety glasses, and a face mask.” For medium risk tasks, where administrative and engineering controls may not adequately protect, adequate PPE should be provided. This may include gloves, eye protection, and/or face shields. Close contact tasks within 6 ft (2m) with someone suspected or confirmed of COVID-19, respiratory protection may be needed. The Center for Construction Research and Training’s (CWPR’s) [COVID19 Standards for US Construction Sites](#), recommends an N95 or higher respiratory protection, for close contact in enclosed spaces.

When workers need PPE, employers must comply with all applicable workplace standards and regulations on selection and use of PPE. One example is OSHA’s standard for PPE in construction (29 CFR 1926 Subpart E), which requires employees to use gloves, eye and face protection, and respiratory protection when job hazards warrant it. OSHA’s Respiratory Protection standard 29 CFR 1910.134 mandates that, when respirators are necessary to protect workers, employers must implement a comprehensive respiratory protection program.

The 3M document, [Optimizing Supplies of Filtering Facepiece Respirators: U.S. Non-Healthcare Workplaces](#), can help with understanding respiratory protection options in the case of shortages, as well as, strategies to extend existing supplies of filtering facepiece respirators, including limited reuse of filtering facepiece respirators where appropriate.

As the CDC recommends face coverings and OSHA recommends face masks⁴ as a public health measure, employers may want a better understanding of the differences between cloth face coverings, surgical masks, and respirators. The following table helps highlight some of these differences. See [3M’s video](#) on the differences between respirators and masks for more information.

Table A: Comparison of Face Coverings, Masks, and Filtering Facepiece Respirators

Comparison feature	Cloth Face Covering	Procedure/Surgical Masks	Filtering Facepiece Respirators (FFRs)
Photo			

Comparison feature	Cloth Face Covering	Procedure/Surgical Masks	Filtering Facepiece Respirators (FFRs)
Description	Cloth mask used to cover mouth and nose.	Disposable procedure mask used to cover nose and mouth. Surgical mask also provides fluid barrier.	Disposable, respirator used to cover nose and mouth.
Certification	None	FDA (surgical)	NIOSH
Fit on face	Loose	Loose	Tight
Intended Use	May help contain spit or phlegm expelled by the wearer, like covering a cough or sneeze with a face tissue	Designed to help reduce liquid droplets that are expelled by the wearer. Fluid barrier in surgical mask is designed to help protect the wearer from splashes of bodily fluids.	Designed to help protect the wearer from potential airborne hazards
Will help reduce the wearer's exposure to airborne particulate hazards when properly selected and worn	No	No	Yes, NIOSH approved N95 FFRs are at least 95% efficient in filtering non-oily particulates per NIOSH 42 CFR 84

This table provides general information concerning the products shown. Always read and follow all user instructions and applicable guidance.

Disinfection of PPE

Per the [CDC guidelines for construction](#), disinfection of reusable PPE is recommended at least at the beginning and end of each shift. Training should be provided to workers on cleaning PPE according to the manufacturer's instructions. There is [guidance available](#) from the U.S. CDC for cleaning and disinfection practices in the workplace.

3M provides the following documents on decontamination of re-usable PPE:

[Cleaning and Disinfecting 3M Reusable Elastomeric Half and Full Facepiece Respirators following Potential Exposure to Coronaviruses \(105.03 KB\)](#)

[Cleaning and Disinfecting 3M™ Scott™ Reusable Full Facepiece Respirators Following Potential Exposure to Coronaviruses \(PDF, 168.51 KB\)](#)

[Cleaning and Disinfecting 3M Powered Air Purifying Respirators following Potential Exposure to Coronaviruses \(237.47 KB\)](#)

[FAQ Disinfecting Fall Protection Equipment – COVID-19 Concerns \(PDF, 107.79 KB\)](#)

[Cleaning and Disinfecting 3M™ Head, Eye and Face Protection Products following Potential Exposure to Coronaviruses](#)

[Cleaning and Disinfecting 3M™ PELTOR™ Protection & Communication Solutions following Potential Exposure to Coronaviruses \(PDF, 713.63 KB\)](#)

Under no circumstances should an attempt be made to clean or wash a 3M filtering facepiece respirator (FFRs). 3M has investigated methods for healthcare facilities to decontaminate FFRs; however, these methods are likely challenging to adopt in most workplaces. While decontamination of filtering face piece respirators such as N95s is not recommended, see the following 3M document for updated information:

[Decontamination Methods for 3M N95 Respirators \(PDF, 127.85 KB\)](#)

Additionally, 3M Commercial Solutions Division can provide [disinfectant cleaners](#) that meet the U.S. EPA's Emerging Pathogen Policy. These sanitizers may be considered for use against the virus which causes COVID-19 on non-critical, hard, non-porous surfaces that may be found in the workplace. Employers should be aware that common sanitizers and disinfectants could contain hazardous chemicals. Where workers are exposed to hazardous chemicals, employers must comply with OSHA's Hazard Communication standard (29 CFR 1910.1200) or other applicable regional/local regulations, Personal Protective Equipment standards (Ex. 29 CFR 1926 Subpart E in construction or 29 CFR 1910 Subpart I in general industry) and other applicable OSHA chemical standards. Employers should also consult [OSHA's Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#) for more information.

Additional Social Distancing Solutions and Technologies

To help maintain 6ft (2m) of separation, communication devices which protect hearing and have integrated radios for communication can help workers to communicate while maintaining their distance from each other.

<https://multimedia.3m.com/mws/media/18288700/3m-peltor-communicate-from-a-distance-flyer.pdf>

Social distancing graphics can help provide visual reminders. See the following floor graphics and signs available from 3M.

https://www.3m.com/3M/en_US/graphics-signage-us/applications/social-distancing/

Connect with 3M Resources

3M has many solutions to help you as you plan for a safe return to the workplace, from innovative products to world class technical support. For more resources on preparing to return to work, visit www.3m.com/coronavirus. For more information about Construction industry, please visit 3M's construction safety [website](#). Contact your local 3M representative for more information on product specific solutions.

References

- 1) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html>
- 2) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>
- 3) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/construction-workers.html>
- 4) <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/construction.html>
- 5) <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/covid-19-back-workplace-adapting-work-places-and-protecting-workers/view>
- 6) https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/COVID-19:_guidance_for_the_workplace#See

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