

Disposable vs Surgical Masks

COVID-19 has seen a surge in the use of disposable respirators and surgical type masks. Below is an explanation of the pros and cons of these types of respiratory protection.

Disposable Respirator (N95)	Surgical Mask
Designed to keep out 95% of airborne hazards	Designed for protection against blood spray, bone fragment, and bodily fluids
Requires fit testing for use	Not designed to protect against airborne hazards
Not designed for re-use	Not designed for re-use
Made of material to filter out particles	Material used for verified surgical masks can keep particles out but not 'homemade' masks made with cloth
Improper use (putting on / taking off) can result in contamination of the mask and increase infection risk	Improper use (putting on / taking off) can result in contamination of the mask and increase infection risk
Subject to stringent testing regarding particle filtration	Not subject to the same testing criteria for particle filtration

As with all hazards make sure you apply the hierarchy of controls. PPE including RPE is a last resort. Controls such as social distancing, hygiene control, and preventing airborne material are higher on the hierarchy than PPE.

