

## Face Mask vs N95 Respirator: Know the Difference



A face mask and N95 respirator are two types of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that are designed to protect employees from various airborne hazards. It's important to know the difference between them, as well as the pros and cons of each.

### Face Mask

A face mask (AKA surgical mask, dental mask, or medical procedure mask) is a loose-fitting, disposable mask that covers your nose and mouth. The face mask stops large droplets from being spread by the person wearing them. Face masks are not designed or certified to seal tightly against the face or prevent the inhalation of small airborne contaminants. They are commonly used in healthcare settings for the protection of the patient.

- Helps block large-particle droplets, splashes, sprays, or splatter that may contain germs (viruses and bacteria) from reaching your mouth and nose.
- Reduces exposure of your saliva and respiratory secretions to others.
- Does NOT provide the wearer with a reliable level of protection from inhaling smaller airborne particles, and is not considered respiratory protection.

### N95 Respirator

An N95 respirator is a respiratory protective device designed to achieve a very close facial fit and very efficient filtration of airborne particles. The “N95” designation means that when subjected to careful testing, the respirator blocks at least 95 percent of very small (.03 micron) test particles.

- If required by an employer then they are regulated under OSHA 1910.134 paragraph (c) (1). This would require fit testing, training, medical evaluation, and a written respiratory program.
- If used voluntarily, then employees must receive the information found within OSHA Appendix D. This appendix covers the use, limitations, cleaning, and storing of an N95 respirator.
- They have a tight seal between the face and the respirator.
- Reduces the wearer’s exposure to particles, including small particle aerosols, and large droplets.