

Summary of CDC Guidance on reuse of N-95 respirators for EMS personnel

The CDC has posted the NIOSH recommendations for extended use and limited re-use of N-95 respirators due to limited supplies of these items at this time. This is a summary of those recommendations. Closely following these guidelines when appropriate could significantly extend the currently limited supply of N-95 masks.

“Extended use” refers to the “practice of wearing the same N95 respirator for repeated close contact encounters with several patients, without removing the respirator between patient encounters.” This practice may be used in screening areas or in Emergency Departments where there is a volume of patients.

What is more likely for EMS providers is the **“limited re-use”** scenario. In this situation, the provider removes the mask between each patient encounter, preserving it for later use. This will extend the supply of N-95 respirators, however, appropriate precautions must be taken to ensure safe re-use. The guidelines state that, if in short supply, N95 respirators may be reused a **limited number of times** by the same EMS provider when contact transmission is not a concern if:

1. The mask is not damaged and maintains structural integrity. For example, if the elastic straps have become loose and the mask cannot be held to the face it cannot be reused.
2. The mask is not soiled with blood, respiratory secretions, dirt, or any bodily fluid.
3. The mask was not used for an aerosol generating procedure (nebulizer treatments, suctioning, NIPPV, intubation, etc.).

Masks must be donned and doffed properly. Providers should use a clean pair of gloves when removing the N-95 from storage and putting it back on. Avoid touching the inside of the mask. This is likely where you run the highest risk of possibly contaminating yourself if there is something on your mask. Be cautious when handling a mask you are going to re-use.

Between uses, the mask should be placed in a paper bag. Do not stuff them in your pocket or seal them in a plastic bag. The bag should be labelled with your name and the number of uses of the mask.

When lacking specific guidance from the manufacturer on re-use, the CDC recommends, based on their data, that masks should not be used more than 5 times before they should be disposed of.

The full CDC guideline is located here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hcwcontrols/recommendedguidanceextuse.html>

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