

INFLUENZA POLICY CLARIFICATION: Use of Masks

It has come to our attention that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has very stringent protocols in place if the use of N95 respirators are to be required in the workplace. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity to clarify our policy.

First, our policy does not require the use of N95 respirators.

Second, when the policy refers to masks, it means surgical facemasks.

Third, if someone (especially those providing direct care to the sick) wishes to use an N95 respirator, please note the following:

- N95 masks need to be fit-tested by a qualified individual
- Some medical conditions may make it unsafe for someone to use an N95 respirator
- The waiver on the other side of this page should be read, signed, and filed appropriately

As a result of this new information, the section on masks in Appendix G will now read (new text **bolded**):

Use of Masks

There are two types of masks: (1) N95 “respirators”¹ and (2) other facemasks.

N95 respirators are designed to prevent the person wearing the mask from breathing in aerosols that may contain the flu virus. While effective, they are also expensive, more difficult to use (they must be fitted, require training and medical clearance), and become uncomfortable to wear. Other facemasks—such as surgical masks or procedure masks—are much less expensive and more available, but they are not as effective at preventing exposure to aerosols. They do help, however, by preventing exposure to larger respiratory droplets and by keeping individuals from touching their mouth and nose. Masks should be discarded if they become wet, or after 4 to 6 hours. They should not be re-used or shared. Hands should be washed after taking off a mask.

Recommendations for the use of masks are fluid; for the latest information, it is best to visit the CDC website (www.cdc.gov or <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/masks.htm>).²

When our diocesan policy calls for the use of a mask, our intention is that a facemask should be used. Individuals who wish to use an N95 respirator in caring for the sick are cautioned that such devices need to be properly fitted and other precautions taken if they are to be used safely. An appropriate waiver (available on the diocesan website’s flu page) should be completed.

More information on N95 respirators are found on the OSHA website:

http://www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html and
<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/respiratoryprotection/index.html>

¹ Refers to masks that meet or exceed the NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) N95 standard.

² Current recommendations call for the use of N95 respirators only within the health care setting. Outside of that environment, masks are generally not recommended except in certain high-risk situations.

Information for employees and volunteers using respirators when not required under the standard

Respirators are an effective method of protection against designated hazards when properly selected and worn. Respirator use is encouraged, even when exposures are below the exposure limit, to provide an additional level of comfort and protection for workers. However, if a respirator is used improperly or not kept clean, the respirators itself can become a hazard to the worker. Sometimes, workers may wear respirators to avoid exposures to hazards, even if the amount of hazardous substance does not exceed the limits set by OSHA standards. If your employer provides respirators for your voluntary use, or if you provide your own respirator, you need to take certain precautions to be sure that the respirator itself does not present a hazard. You should do the following:

1. Read and heed all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirator's limitations.
2. Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern. NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, certifies respirators. A label statement of certification should appear on the respirators or respirator packaging. It will tell you what the respirator is designed for and how much it will protect you.
3. Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors, or very small solid particles of fumes or smoke.
4. Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.

I certify by signing this document that I have read and understood the above information.

Employee's Signature

Date

Print Name

Company Name