

## Respirator Medical Evaluations and Fit Testing During the COVID-19 Pandemic Employer Responsibilities and the Evaluation Process

### Overview

Whether it's a health care worker caring for COVID-19 infected patients or a firefighter inside a building filled with toxic smoke, a respirator allows an employee to breathe clean air. Many employees are being introduced to required workplace respirator use due to the widespread community transmission of SARS CoV-2 (COVID-19). Employers are re-evaluating employees' essential job functions and considering which functions place employees at risk for COVID-19.

But for employees with underlying health conditions such as lung or heart issues, a respirator can place a dangerous amount of stress on the body. That's why the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued the **Respiratory Protection Standard, 29 CFR 1910.134(e)**, which requires an initial medical evaluation to determine an employee's ability to use a respirator before he or she is fit tested or required to use the respirator in the workplace. The standard does not specify any annual requirement for medical evaluations; however, the physician or other licensed health care provider (PLHCP) may prescribe annual tests to ensure an employee's continued ability to safely wear a respirator.

### Employer Responsibilities

OSHA requires employers to arrange for their employees to complete a respirator medical evaluation first, even before a respirator fit test. Employers must provide the medical professional with sufficient information to determine the employee's fitness, including information about the workplace, job tasks, and equipment to be used. The employer must also provide the evaluating medical professional with:

- The type and weight of the respirator to be used by the employee
- The duration and frequency of respirator use (including use for rescue and escape)
- The expected physical work effort
- Types of additional protective clothing and equipment to be worn
- Temperature and humidity extremes that may be encountered

At a minimum, employers must provide additional evaluations if employees show signs or symptoms that are related to their ability to wear a respirator.

### Respirator Medical Evaluation Requirements

For respirator clearance, an employer must complete an [Employer Authorization and Information for Respiratory Evaluation Form](#) and include the following information:

- Respirator type and weight
- Respirator use duration and frequency
- Expected work effort
- Expected temperature and humidity conditions
- Respiratory protection plan
- Other required personal protective equipment (PPE)



## The Evaluation Process

The respirator medical evaluation starts with gathering information about the employee.

1. Employees must complete an [OSHA Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire](#). The employer must ensure that employees understand the questionnaire well enough to answer the questions correctly.
2. A physician or other licensed health care provider (PLHCP) reviews the questionnaire responses to determine if the employee has any symptoms or conditions that could undermine the effectiveness of a respirator.
3. If the information-gathering portion of the evaluation reveals any concerns, the PLHCP may ask the employee to complete a follow-up medical evaluation that may include any medical tests, consultations, or diagnostic procedures that the PLHCP considers necessary to determine whether the employee can wear a respirator.
4. If an employee receives respirator medical clearance, the clinician provides the employee and employer with a written medical opinion (WMO) for respirator use.
5. Employees with an up-to-date written medical opinion for respirator use may then proceed to **respirator fit testing (qualitative or quantitative)**. Fit testing must occur with a respirator that's the same make, model, and size of one he/she will wear on the job while also wearing any other required equipment (e.g., glasses). Employers must provide the employer with the respirator for the fit test. If fit testing for an N95 respirator or more protective filtering facepiece respirator (FFR), qualitative fit testing is recommended so the respirator may be used at work. Quantitative fit testing does not allow for FFR reuse.
6. If an employee is not cleared for respirator use or reveals potential limitations associated with a certain respirator, the clinician may request additional medical information or recommend an alternative, such as a loose-fitting facepiece.

All information provided during the evaluation process must be kept confidential. Upon completion of the evaluation, the employee must be given a chance to discuss the questionnaire and the results of the physical exam with the clinician.

## Contact Concentra for Respiratory Medical Screenings

Respirator medical evaluations and fit tests are conducted at all Concentra<sup>®</sup> medical centers. For more information, please contact your local Concentra medical center. You can find their information on [concentra.com](https://www.concentra.com).