

Respirator Medical Evaluations and Fit Testing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Employer Responsibilities and the Evaluation Process

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 a 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 Respirator Protection standard specifies annual fit test requirements for all tight-fitting respirators. OSHA's minimum requirement includes the following reasons for additional medical evaluations:

- Medical signs and symptoms related to wearing a respirator
- At the request of the physician or other licensed health care provider (PLHCP) or employees' supervisor
- Fit testing and use of the respirator indicate need
- Any change in the worksite's respirator protection program

Employer Responsibilities

OSHA requires employers to arrange for their employees to complete a respirator medical evaluation before he or she is fit tested or required to use the respirator in the workplace. In order for the physician or PLHCP to best evaluate employees for respirator use, the 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 is required by OSHA to 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
- Respiratory protection plan

The Respirator Medical Evaluation Process

The respirator medical evaluation starts with gathering information about the employee and his or her expected respirator use.

1. Employees must complete the mandatory [OSHA Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire](#). The employer must ensure that employees understand the questionnaire well enough to answer the questions correctly.
2. The 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. All information provided during the medical clearance evaluation process must be kept confidential. Upon completion of the medical clearance evaluation, the employee must be given a chance to discuss the questionnaire and the results of the physical exam with the clinician.
5. After the medical clearance evaluation, the employee will receive a copy of the Written Medical Opinion for Respirator Use.
6. The employer will also receive this document in the Concentra Employer Portal.

Respirator Fit Testing Process for Tight-fitting Respirators (Qualitative or Quantitative)

If the employee wears a tight-fitting respirator, a respirator fit test is needed. After receiving clearance for respirator use, an employee may proceed to fit testing.

1. The fit test must occur with a respirator that's the same make, model, and size of the respirator the employee will wear on the job, as well as any other required personal protective equipment (e.g., protective eyewear, hearing protection). The employer must provide the employee with the respirator for the fit test.
2. 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 alternate respirator, such as a loose-fitting facepiece.
3. The employer will receive the completed Fit Test form in the Concentra Employer Portal.

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.

Concentra Respirator Medical Clearance and Fit Test

Respirator medical clearance and respirator fit tests are available on a walk-in basis at Concentra® medical centers. For respirator medical clearance and Fit Testing to occur at Concentra, the employer must complete an [Employer Authorization and Information for Respiratory Evaluation Form](#) that will cover the required information for the PLHCP. How much time the medical evaluation and /or fit testing requires will vary depending on the employee, examining clinician, and activity at the center.

What to Bring to a Respirator Medical Clearance and/or Fit Test

Employees seeking medical clearance and/or fit test should bring a photo ID to their visit.

Employees visiting for a respirator fit test must bring the respirator they will wear on the job, as well as any other personal protective equipment (PPE) that will be worn with the respirator. Employees visiting for respirator medical clearance may choose to bring a completed OSHA Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire to save time at the beginning of the visit. Concentra will also provide this at the visit for employees who are unable to complete the questionnaire beforehand.

Contact Concentra for Respiratory Medical Screenings

Respirator medical evaluations and fit tests are conducted at all Concentra® medical centers. For more information, please contact your local Concentra medical center. You can find their information on Concentra.com.