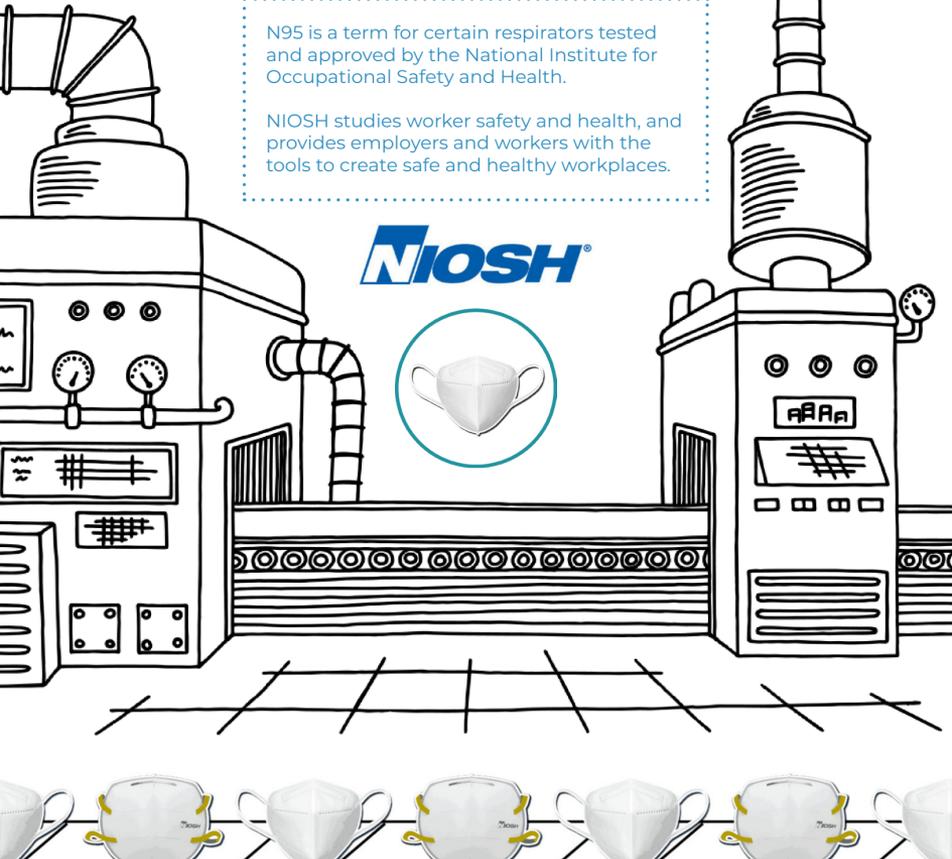


# WHAT IS AN N95 AND HOW DO I TEST THE SEAL?

N95 is a term for certain respirators tested and approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

NIOSH studies worker safety and health, and provides employers and workers with the tools to create safe and healthy workplaces.



## N95s are made of special filtering materials.

The term "N95" means NIOSH has **tested and proved** the special materials filter out at least 95% of very small air particles.

**Surgical N95s** have features needed in situations with more splashes and sprays, like surgery, so they are more resistant to fluid and breakdown.



Certain N95s used for healthcare are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

When thinking about N95s and how they protect you, remember:

## FILTER & FIT



N95s filter out certain particles, including droplets in the air, **before** the air reaches your mouth, nose, and lungs.

This process is a result of the filtering material and how the N95 fits you. N95s are designed to ensure the air you inhale goes through a filter first.



While all N95s have filtering material, all N95s may not fit the same. **NIOSH-approved** N95s have two straps that go around the head, instead of loops that go around the ears. Straps around the head provide a good fit and better seal to the face.

## It is important to do a FIT TEST on your N95 annually to ensure it fits correctly and is properly filtering air.

Have your employer conduct a medical evaluation to ensure the N95 is the correct respirator for you, does not hurt, or worsen any medical conditions.

Fit each respirator model you may wear to make sure it fits your face snug—without pain—and allows you to breathe easily.

Put on the N95 correctly.

Check the N95 seal with a user seal check to verify the air you inhale is filtered first.

Conducting user seal checks are important because if the N95 is not sealed it can allow unfiltered air, possibly contaminated with germs, to be inhaled.

Sometimes facial hair makes it hard to seal N95s to your face, because the hair creates small gaps for unfiltered air to leak into your N95.

Small gaps may also result from damaged, loose, or worn out straps over time, or even changes in weight which may cause an N95 to no longer fit correctly.



## Now that you know why a user seal check is important, how do you conduct one?

Here's how it works:

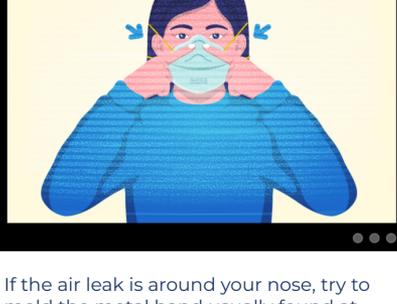
Put on your N95.

Once on, put your hands lightly over the surface to block the filter. Cover as much of the area as you can without pressing down on your face, then exhale gently.

If the N95 is working properly, you will feel pressure as the air you exhale builds up inside your N95.

If the N95 is not working properly, you will possibly hear the leak, see your glasses or face shield fog up, or feel the seal around the edges of the N95 where your hands are.

## If your N95 is not working properly, what do you do?



If the air leak is around your nose, try to mold the metal band usually found at the top of the N95 to your nose. To do this start from the top of the metal band and use both hands to push the band down around your nose.



You can also readjust the N95 straps. While you can not make the straps shorter or longer, you can move them up and down on your head to increase the tightness against your face and seal off the leaks.

**PRO-TIP**  
NEVER cross the straps, put them behind your ears, or across your ears because these options do not hold the N95 well snug.

If you use these steps and still have a leak, consider replacing your possibly worn out N95 with a new one or get fit tested for a different respirator type.



Using NIOSH-approved N95s are necessary and your healthcare employer is responsible for ensuring this happens in the workplace.

They protect you from germs, but also protect others from any germs that you may be carrying.

For more information on topics like this, visit [cdc.gov/projectfirstline](https://www.cdc.gov/projectfirstline). See all of NNPHI's Project Firstline interactive learning experiences.

