

epiTRENDS

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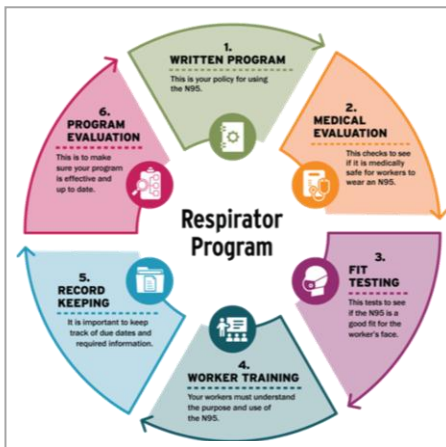
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Qualitative Fit Tester Training

Proper use of protective equipment is essential for workplace safety. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has developed training materials for qualitative fit testing for N95 respirators.

Respiratory Protection

Respiratory protection is essential for healthcare and laboratory workers. Respirators are designed to reduce a worker's exposure to airborne contaminants. Respirators come in various sizes and must be individually selected to fit the wearer's face and provide a tight seal. During the early COVID-19 pandemic the lack of sufficient respirators (N95s) put healthcare workers at risk. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need for workers to use respirators in all healthcare settings, including long-term care facilities (LTCF).



Tao Kwan-Gett, MD, MPH
State Health Officer

Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH
State Epidemiologist,
Communicable Disease

Marcia J. Goldoft, MD
Scientific Editor

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Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most LTCF were not required to use respiratory protection. However, in 2020, LTCF were faced with meeting the respirator requirements. Using respirators at work means LTCF, and other workplaces, must comply with the Respiratory Protection Program requirements. These requirements include: having a written program, providing medical evaluations, providing annual N95 fit testing, giving annual N95 worker training, keeping records, and evaluating the program. In Washington state, Labor and Industries (L&I) regulates and enforces the respirator rule (WAC 296-842). Due to the newness of the regulatory requirements for LTCF settings, a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency stakeholder group, including the DOH Office of Communicable Disease Epidemiology, was formed to provide non-regulatory guidance.

Since 2020, DOH has assisted LTCF with the Respiratory Protection Program requirements. DOH has provided:

- Consultation
- Medical evaluation and respirator fit testing
- Educational materials; templates, website
- Classes: virtual/onsite, microlearning webinars, presentations

The program has experienced multiple funding changes. Currently, an occupational health nurse provides educational outreach to facilities to educate them on the Respiratory Protection Program requirements so facilities can maintain compliance with the Respirator Rule and protect workers from occupational respiratory hazards.



Training for Fit Testers

A recent accomplishment of the program was the development of a free, publicly available, self-paced online module to teach qualitative N95 fit testing. A fit test is a test protocol conducted to verify that a respirator is both comfortable and provides the expected protection. A qualitative fit test relies on the user's taste and smell senses to determine if there is a gap in the respirator seal.

To provide fit testing for their employees, facilities can pay a vendor or third party, or fit test staff in-house. Previously, DOH occupational health nurses held monthly, live webinars to teach facilities how to fit test according to the regulations, use fit test kits, troubleshoot, and complete required paperwork. When funding was available, occupational health nurses would visit facilities to provide additional hands-on training. With program and staffing changes, it was necessary to provide a resource for fit tester training to replace this service. The creation of a new self-paced e-module allows facilities to learn at their own pace in various settings, and train multiple fit testers at different times. DOH knows of no other resource in Washington that is publicly available and as comprehensive.

Certification is not required for a person to be a fit tester for respirators. However, state regulations require employers to ensure that valid fit tests are being conducted ([WAC 296-842-22010](#)). The new training material provides documentation of course completion.

The training module is designed to give fit testers a practical introduction to the process of qualitative fit testing (not to be confused with quantitative fit testing). The appropriate audience for the training is LTCF, healthcare facilities, staff at local health jurisdictions wanting to provide this service for their own staff or for the public, or anyone else who needs to learn how to fit test according to Washington state rules. The module covers:

- N95 overview
- N95 fit test equipment
- What to prepare before the fit test
- How to do a fit test as outlined in regulations
- What to do after the fit test
- Next steps
- A quiz that tests comprehension

Before the Training

A fit tester needs a qualitative fit test kit to use at their facility, which can be chosen based on information included in the training. Facilities or organizations with large Respiratory Protection Programs may choose to train multiple fit testers, in which case they will need to purchase multiple fit test kits. Guidance on purchasing a fit test kit is available on the Respiratory Protection Program webpage as well as in the module. Fit testers also need to understand the Respiratory WAC, have read through their facility's Written Program, and taken the N95 worker training. They need to be able to accommodate a variety of work shifts as all N95 activities need to be done on paid work time. Completing the module should also be done during paid work time.

After the Training

After completing the training and receiving at least 80% on the knowledge test, fit testers are told to practice on others while being observed and audited using the checklist discussed in the module (and available on the Respiratory Protection Program webpage). Fit testers are encouraged to keep a copy of the evaluation checklist themselves and refer to it while practicing to ensure they are following the correct protocol. After completing multiple practice fit tests correctly, as evidenced by the evaluation checklist, fit testers can begin fit testing on staff and recording fit tests for Respiratory Protection Program records. The employer will be held responsible for ensuring valid fit testing is being done.

Providing workers with correctly fitted respirators protects them, their colleagues, and their patients. Public health resources can support facilities in meeting respiratory protection requirements.

Resources

DOH Respiratory Protection Program webpage: [Respiratory Protection Program for Long-Term Care Facilities | Washington State Department of Health](#)

DOH fit testing information and module link: [Education Opportunities | Washington State Department of Health](#)

DOH fit tester training e-module (on WA Portal website): [Qualitative Fit Tester Training | Healthier Washington Collaboration Portal](#)

DOH Respiratory Protection Program resources (including flyers and videos for fit testing): [Resources for Respiratory Protection | Washington State Department of Health](#)



<https://vimeo.com/699609469>

Fit tester evaluation checklist for long-term care facilities: [Evaluating the Fit Tester](#)

Qualitative fit test kit options: [Fit Test Kit and Options](#)

Regulations related to respirators:

[Chapter 296-842 WAC:](#)

[WAC 296-842-22010](#)