

Respirator Masks

We have a staff member who mixes chemotherapy who is having a hard time getting fitted for a respirator mask. Can you recommend a respirator mask for people who are difficult to fit?

Some procedures that involve handling chemotherapy or hazardous drugs (HDs), such as decontamination of the biological safety cabinet or HD spill clean up, require the use of a particulate respirator mask. A particulate respirator mask is suitable for use with HDs if it is NIOSH-approved and has a rating of N95 or greater. There are three kinds of particulate respirator masks available:

- Disposable or filtering face piece respirator with built in filters
- Reusable or elastomeric respirator mask with filter attachments
- Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) masks

Disposable or filtering face piece respirators require fit testing while elastomeric and PAPR masks do not. A staff member who is having trouble getting fitted for a disposable/filtering face piece respirator has a couple of options:

1. Try a different brand. There is more than one brand of disposable/filtering face piece respirator (i.e., Kimberly-Clark and 3M) and they tend to fit differently.
2. Obtain one of the respirator masks that do not require fit testing. This is a good option for staff members with facial hair (i.e., beards) that make them difficult to fit. Note that these are larger masks that require cleaning of non-disposable parts.

Reference

BC Cancer Agency Provincial Pharmacy Directive VI-30: Personal Protective Equipment. July 31, 2013.