



What the General Public should know and understand about Respirators and Avian Influenza (H5N1)

Currently, we are not aware of any country or government in the world recommending the use of respirators by the general public for the virus that causes Avian Influenza H5N1 (Bird Flu) or any other influenza. However, the World Health Organization (WHO), US Center for Disease Control (CDC), US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and several European and/ or National Health Protection agencies have recommended that health care workers exposed to patients with confirmed or suspected Avian Influenza use respiratory protection during certain procedures. Government approved particulate respirators help reduce exposure to the Avian Influenza virus and recommendations include US NIOSH approved N95, European CE certified EN143P2 / EN149 FFP2, EN149FFP3, or higher-level respiratory protection. Recommendations for respiratory protection have also been made for workers involved in culling and inspecting infected birds, and for people exposed to sick birds.

It is believed that most cases of Avian Influenza (H5N1) infection in humans have resulted from contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. In such situations, people should avoid contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces, and should be careful when handling and cooking poultry. Strict hand hygiene, such as frequent hand-washing, must also be performed. In addition to direct contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces, it is possible that the particles that contain Avian Flu virus could become airborne. As other airborne biological agents, airborne Avian Flu virus, can be filtered by respirators with particulate filters. Biological agents, such as viruses, are particles and can be filtered by particulate filters with the same efficiency as non-biological particles having the same physical characteristics (size, shape, etc.). However, unlike many non-biological particles, biological agents do not have exposure limits established by the government. This means that any amount of virus particles you

breathe may be unsafe. Therefore, while respirators will help reduce exposure to airborne avian influenza virus particles, there is no guarantee that the user will not contract avian flu. Respirators may help reduce exposures to airborne biological contaminants, but they don't eliminate the risk of exposure, infection, illness, or death.

Nevertheless, if people in the general public make a personal decision to use a government approved respirator to help reduce their exposure to airborne influenza virus, they need to understand that:

1. Reducing exposure to the airborne influenza virus particles does not mean that the risk of exposure, infections and illness has been eliminated. Respirators only reduce the number of airborne particles that can get into your breathing zone. Also, respirators will not prevent you from catching the flu in other ways such as touching your mouth, nose or eyes with contaminated hands or objects, or eating contaminated food. At this time the CDC recommends the best precaution for the general public is hand washing.
2. In order for a respirator to be most effective, you must properly wear the respirator during the entire time you're exposed. Removing the respirator to eat, drink, or smoke while you are in a contaminated area means you will be increasing the amount of virus particles you are breathing. You should contact the respirator manufacturer for further information on proper fit.
3. Fit of the respirator to your face is very important to minimize the number of virus particles getting inside your respirator. Particles can enter your respirator through any leaks between the respirator and your face large enough to let them in. Hair from beards and mustaches or anything that prevents the respirator from directly touching your skin can prevent a proper seal. Following the fitting and the fit-checking instructions that come with the respirator are very important. Achieving a good fit means more of the air you breathe goes through the respirator filter.
4. Respirators are not intended for use by children or by individuals with a medical condition, such as asthma, emphysema or a history of heart disease, which may be

aggravated by use of a respirator. If you have such a condition, consult your health care provider before use.

5. Disposable respirators should be thrown away after they are used and should not be shared with others.
6. Be sure to read and follow all instructions on the fit, use and warnings provided by the manufacturer before using any respirator.
7. Please be cautious of claims being made by websites and other sources regarding the use of respirators for protection against Avian influenza. We recommend that you reference CDC, WHO, and other government authorities for guidance.