

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: January 12, 2022

From: Deputy Under Secretary for Health Performing the Delegable Duties of the Under Secretary for Health

Subj: Expanded Use of N95 Respirators for Enhanced Coronavirus 19 (COVID-19) Omicron Variant Transmission Risk Mitigation

To: Veterans Integrated Service Network VISN Directors (10N1-23)

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to temporarily authorize expanded use of N95 respirators to employees working in VHA medical facilities as a risk mitigation strategy during the COVID-19 Omicron variant surge. The mandatory use of N95s as part of a facility Respiratory Protection Program is not altered by this new expanded use effort.

2. Employees who are currently only required to use a face mask **may now elect to use** an N95 respirator instead. The option of each employee to use one N95 respirator every day in lieu of one face mask is voluntary.

3. This expanded use of N95s does not require medical clearance or fit-testing. However, each facility must ensure that each employee receives training prior to first use. The training of the N95 respirators must cover:

- How to inspect, put on and remove it;
- How to dispose of it;
- Limitations and capabilities of the respirator;
- Procedures for storing it;
- Medical conditions that may contraindicate N95 respirator use; and
- What to do if the employee experiences difficulties or symptoms related to N95 respirator use (e.g., skin rash or irritation).

4. This expanded use of N95 respirators complies with OSHA requirements. Please see [OSHA's ETS Fact Sheet Mini Respiratory Protection Program](https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4121.pdf) (<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4121.pdf>) for all employer requirements under 29 Code of Federal Regulations 1910.504.

5. Facilities will continue to use Medical Surgical Prime Vendor (MSPV) contracts as the first and primary source of supply for N95 respirators. Facilities will not use local or

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regional contracts for N95 respirators. Use of Government Purchase Cards (GPC) to purchase N95s, including GPC purchases from a MSPV, is not authorized. If facilities require additional N95s to implement expanded use, they should contact their assigned Logistics Field Support Representative and submit a request through the [National Contingency Response Tool \(https://ncrt.va.gov/#/\)](https://ncrt.va.gov/#/). VHA Regional Readiness Centers have N95 respirators available to meet facility needs without delay.

6. Facilities will record all N95 transactions in the Generic Inventory Package (GIP). Maintaining accurate facility GIP inventory levels is crucial to reporting and tracking N95 burn rates throughout VHA. VHA will review this data during Healthcare Operations Center Morning Leadership Briefings on a recurring basis.

7. Please address questions regarding occupational safety and health issues to VHAOccSafetyandHealthAction@va.gov. Your local Occupational Safety and Health staff are also familiar with these requirements. Please address questions regarding procurement and logistics issues to vhalogopscenter@va.gov.



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