

Position Statement

Respiratory Protection for Medical Laboratory Personnel

It is the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science's (CSMLS) position that N95 respirators are the minimum level of protection for medical laboratory personnel who may be exposed to airborne infectious agents. This is in line with recommendations by the Government of Canada and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Air purifying respirators such as the N95, help reduce the concentration of microorganisms in the air inhaled by the user to an acceptable exposure level. Scientific studies on the efficacy of these respirators supports their superiority over standard surgical masks in the reduction of exposure to airborne and droplet contamination when used appropriately.

Concerns related to pandemics have heightened awareness concerning respiratory protection for health care workers. Respiratory exposure to airborne infectious agents is dependent on several factors:

- the type of infectious agent,
- the size of infectious particles,
- the concentration of infectious agents in the aerosol,
- the persistence of the aerosol,
- the length of exposure time.

In all Canadian jurisdictions, employers are responsible for ensuring a healthy and safe work environment for employees. This includes making appropriate control measures available to protect workers from exposure to infectious agents. A respiratory protection program that contains provisions on selection of respirator, training, user fit testing and maintenance of the respirator (i.e. single-use disposable or reusable) is recommended.

All laboratories should have a plan in place that is defensible and ensures due diligence in the protection of workers. Until enough evidence is available to support changes to current best practice, N95 respirators should be used as the minimum standard for health care workers facing potential exposure to respiratory infectious agents.

References:

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