

Position Statement

Respiratory Protection for Medical Laboratory Personnel

In keeping with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations (CDC), it is the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science's (CSMLS) position that N-95 respirators are the minimum level of protection for laboratory personnel who may be exposed to airborne infectious agents.

The majority of 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.

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

- 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.

The CSMLS believes that 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, N-95 respirators should be used as the minimum standard for health care workers facing potential exposure to respiratory infectious agents.

References

World Health Organization; Laboratory Biosafety Manual, 3rd Edition, 2004.

https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp_part/

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/n95dayinfographics.html>

https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/prevention/respiratory_protection.html

<http://canadianbiosafetystandards.collaboration.gc.ca/cbh-gcb/ch6-10-eng.php#s93>

<http://lois-laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/H-5.67/FullText.html>

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