

2. Medical masks

2.1 Fluid repellent surgical face masks (FRSM) and disposable respirators (FFP3/ FFP2/ N95)

This excludes re-usable respirators, that can be re-used according to manufacturer's instructions.

FFP3/FFP2/N95 respirators have a large capacity for the filtration and retention of airborne contaminants. Sessional use or re-use over the course of a day in health or social care, would not approach anywhere near that capacity.

Sessional use

The use of masks for one HCW to use in one work area. This is currently recommended in the UK Infection Prevention and Control guidance.

- it should be disposed of if it becomes moist, damaged, visibly soiled
- the duration (number of hours) of sessional use is dependent on local (for example, heat, activity length, shift-length) and individual factors. In practice, this may vary from 2 to 6 hours
- if masks are touched or adjusted, hand hygiene should be performed immediately
- if the mask is removed for any reason (for example, upon exiting the ward area, taking a break or completing a shift), they are disposed of as clinical waste, unless they can be safely reused as outlined below

Resuse

Important requirements are as follows:

- the mask should be removed and discarded if soiled, damaged, or hard to breathe through
- masks with elastic ear hooks should be re-used (tie-on face masks are less suitable because they are more difficult to remove)
- hand hygiene should be performed before removing the face mask
- face masks should be carefully folded so the outer surface is held inward and against itself to reduce likely contact with the outer surface during storage
- the folded mask should be stored between uses in a clean sealable bag/ box which is marked with the person's name and is then properly stored in a well-defined place
- hand hygiene should be performed after removing the face mask
- some models of PPE cannot be physically reused as they deform once being donned and do not go back to original condition (meaning it would be difficult to re-don and achieve a fit check). Fit checks should be performed each time a respirator is donned if it is reused

Alternatives to standard PPE

There is insufficient evidence to consider homemade masks or cloth masks in health and care settings.