Guidance on Mask Use When Outdoor Air Quality Is Poor Due to Air Pollution From Wildfire or Other Smoke

When the air quality is poor, the best way to reduce your exposure to air pollution and protect your health is to reduce your time outside and decrease the intensity of physical activities, especially outdoors. Wearing a high-quality mask can also help reduce your exposure by filtering out some of the pollution if you must be outside for extended periods of time. Not all masks are the same, and masks should be tightly fitted for the best protection. If you want to wear a mask, read this guidance on proper fitting and use.

When should someone wear a mask?
When the outdoor air quality is poor, consider wearing a mask if you have symptoms of air pollution exposure, such as coughing or throat or eye irritation, and you find that wearing a mask helps reduce these symptoms.

When should someone <u>not</u> wear a mask?
- When they are unable to wear a mask correctly (see "How should a mask fit?")
    - Wearing a mask incorrectly provides little or no filtration and can make you believe you are protected when you are not.
- When wearing a mask becomes uncomfortable or makes it harder to breathe, such as during very hot weather or while exerting yourself
- When they are younger than age 2

What type of mask is appropriate for reducing exposure to air pollution?
- Well-fitting respirators, such as N95s, generally offer the best protection against pollution. Whichever type of mask you choose, it is important to wear it consistently and correctly — snugly over your nose, mouth and chin.
    - If possible, choose a respirator tested and certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), such as an N95.
        - NIOSH-certified respirators have markings printed on them to indicate that they are authentic.
        - N95s are the most widely available mask of this type, but other types (such as N99, N100, P95, P99, P100, R95, R99 and R100) offer the same or better protection. N95s are sold at many hardware and home repair stores and pharmacies.
    - Masks that have not been tested and certified by NIOSH, such as KN95s and KF94s, may still provide some protection but may not work as well against smoke and other small particles that can injure the lungs.

    - Masks with exhalation valves can help reduce your exposure to air pollution but do not prevent you from spreading infectious diseases such as COVID-19.
- Tight-fitting surgical masks without gaps in the sides can provide some protection if another mask is not available. Cloth masks are not recommended to filter out pollution.
- Children age 2 and older can wear masks.
    - Choose a mask size that best fits your child's face. Some NIOSH-certified respirators are available in smaller sizes. For more information, see the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units' mask guidance for children and pregnant people, available at bit.ly/pehsu-mask-guidance.
- If you have heart or lung conditions, check with your health care provider about the type of mask that may be best for you.

How should a mask fit?

- Follow any user instructions for the mask, including how to a conduct a user seal check for NIOSH-certified respirators every time you put one on.
- Place the mask over your nose and under your chin, and pinch the metal part of the mask tightly over the top of your nose.
- Note that masks fit best on clean-shaven skin.
- Throw out your mask if it gets harder to breathe through, the inside gets dirty or it gets wet or damaged.
- Use a new mask every day if you can, as large amounts of smoke or pollution reduce how well the filtration works. If you cannot use a new mask every day, reusing masks can still be beneficial.

To learn more, see these resources:

- NIOSH: Community Respirators and Masks, available at bit.ly/niosh-mask-guidance
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Wildfire Smoke Fact Sheet, available at bit.ly/epa-wildfire-smoke
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): How To Wear Your Filtering Facepiece Respirator, available at bit.ly/cdc-facepiece-respirator
- CDC: Protecting Workers and the Public From Wildfire Smoke, available at bit.ly/cdc-public-wildfire-smoke

For more information, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **air quality**.

1.24