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## **REGULATORY/ MEDICAL HEALTH SERVICES**

### **EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**

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TO: EMS All

#### **REGARDING: EXTENDED USE OF N-95 MASKS**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a scarce supply of personal protective equipment (PPE). This potentially threatens the safety of First Responders and health care providers. To address this, Orange County Emergency Medical Services (OCEMS) will support implementation of the Extended Use approach to optimize the supply of N-95 respirators (masks) as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control.

#### **EXTENDED USE STRATEGY**

If supplies of N-95 respirators are scarce and in danger of being completely depleted, First Responders may initiate the Extended Use protocol for this resource with the support of OCEMS. Extended use refers to the practice of wearing the same N95 respirator for repeated close contact with several different patients, without removing the respirator between individual patient encounters. The decision to implement policies that permit extended use of N95 respirators should be made by the individual First Responder agencies/departments in consultation with those who manage the institution's/agency's respiratory protection program and occupational health.

If extended use is permitted by First Responder agencies, providers must strictly adhere to the controls designed to prevent contamination of the masks. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Discard N95 respirators following use during aerosol generating procedures.
- Discard N95 respirators contaminated with blood, respiratory or nasal secretions, or other bodily fluids from patients.
- Discard N95 respirators following close contact with, or exit from, the care area of any patient co-infected with an infectious disease requiring contact precautions.
- Consider use of a cleanable face shield (preferred) over an N95 respirator and/or other steps (e.g., masking patients, use of engineering controls) to reduce surface contamination.
- Perform hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after touching or adjusting the respirator (if necessary for comfort or to maintain fit).

Extended use alone is unlikely to degrade respiratory protection. However, first responder agencies should develop clearly written procedures to advise staff to:

- Discard any respirator that is obviously damaged or becomes hard to breathe through.

N-95 respirators may be worn continuously under this policy for up to 8 hours. At that time, the respirator must be replaced before the next patient contact.

If agencies opt to adopt an extended use of N-95 respirator policy, CDC guidance for healthcare settings must be followed.

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hcwcontrols/recommendedguidanceextuse.html>

It is important to note that at this time, OCEMS does not support re-use (different than extended use) of N-95 respirators given the potential risks to the health care provider.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carl Schultz, MD". The signature is cursive and includes a stylized "MD" at the end.

Carl H. Schultz, MD  
EMS Medical Director  
Orange County EMS Agency