

September 18, 2009

John Auerbach, Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02108

Subject: Urgent need for Respiratory Protection for Healthcare Workers – Use of N-95 respirators

Dear Commissioner Auerbach:

The Massachusetts Nurses Association strongly urges the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to require N95 Respiratory protection for nurses and other caregivers exposed to risk of infection from patients suspected or confirmed of H1N1 infection. N-95 protection constitutes a necessary upgrade from the current recommendation for surgical mask protection.

Several prominent institutions have all very recently declared surgical masks to be inadequate protection for workers from H1N1 and have recommended instead N-95 respirators for patients suspected or confirmed to have H1N1 infection. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) (September 3, 2009) and the American Medical Association (AMA) (September 14, 2009) both confirmed that N-95 respirators should be used by healthcare workers as protection when caring for patients with H1N1 (Swine) flu.

The MNA is requesting that the Massachusetts Department of Public Health reconsider their past assertion that N-95 respirators are not needed when caring for patients with H1N1 Influenza or suspected of having H1N1. IOM is now in agreement with CDC, OSHA and NIOSH and the AMA. There seems no doubt that N-95 is the appropriate standard for Massachusetts. See attached.

MNA has polled groups of its nurse members and many have already been fit tested for N95 Respirators over the past few years and are able to wear N 95 respirators when and if they are made available to them. This is a strong indication that N95 protection is not an unreasonable or unmanageable standard to meet. It is moreover, critical for maintaining a healthy workforce during the expected pandemic outbreak in Massachusetts.

We urge MDPH to act with haste.

Sincerely,

Julie B. Pinkham, RN
Executive Director

Beth Piknick, RN
President

Cc: Dr. Alfred DeMaria, M.D., Director, Bureau of Controllable Disease
Jean Pontikas, Interim Director, Division of Health Care Quality