



Massachusetts Nurses Association Position Statement Opposing the Decontamination Methods for N95 Masks/ Respirators & Nurses Right to Informed Consent and Refusal If Requested

Introduction

The Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) has reviewed and evaluated the limited available information, including the lack of any peer-reviewed evidence-based research on decontamination methods for N95 facepiece respirators that are currently being utilized across Massachusetts. The lack of reliable information on these practices, as well as the potential safety risks these decontamination procedures pose to the health and safety of health care workers, as well as the general public at large require that these practices be halted.

We concur with National Nurses United (NNU) (2020), which has declared that **NO METHOD** that is presently available for the decontamination of N95 filtering facepiece respirators is both safe and effective. NNU's position is based upon the failure of these methods to meet the following three criteria:

- It must effectively inactivate the pathogen.
- It must not degrade the performance of the respirator including filtration, structural integrity, and face seal.
- It must not introduce an additional hazard to the worker wearing the respirator.

Right to Informed Consent:

All healthcare professionals have the right to be informed by their employer of the type of decontamination method used, including instructions and information which outline the specific decontamination procedures. This applies to onsite or offsite decontamination which may be outsourced to an

other company (e.g., Battelle or Steris). A fact sheet describing all potential health effects of the decontamination used should be provided to you. If you make the decision to use a decontaminated product, we encourage you to ask for a written consent form to sign and retain a copy of that document for your records. Please make sure that you put your name on your mask prior to turning it in for decontamination and make sure that your mask is returned to you.

Right to Refusal:

If you refuse to reuse a N95 facepiece respirator, you should be provided with a new product without fear of retribution or disciplinary consequences. If your employer refuses to provide you with that vital equipment, you should contact a member of your MNA bargaining committee for further information.

Right to Report:

The MNA encourages members to report any adverse health effects from wearing decontaminated N95 respirators. This includes:

- Signs and symptoms associated with off-gassing from chemicals used in decontamination. Hydrogen peroxide is one of the most common chemicals used. Signs and symptoms of hydrogen peroxide vapor exposure include upper airway irritation, hypersensitivity to odors, and other non-specific symptoms such as nausea, fatigue and headache, and should be immediately reported.
- Any sign or symptom of potential infection with SARS-CoV-2 and/or respiratory infection should be reported to your employer immediately.

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- Any N95 respirator with signs of discoloration or other signs of degradation such as strap breakage, improper fit, face-seal leakage and delamination nose-foam should be discarded and reported to your employer.

Battelle and Steris decontamination systems that have been given emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are required to provide weekly reports to the FDA of any problems or adverse events *that they are aware of*. Issues that these companies do not report will be overlooked by the FDA.

Right to Safe Work Environment

All nurses in Massachusetts have a right to a safe work environment. MNA members under a collective bargaining agreement should also communicate with their elected leadership in order to avail themselves of any protections under the Collective Bargaining Agreement, as well as to raise any health and safety issues through your committee. Other rights exist under state and federal laws to protect the health and safety of employees. The committee may also wish to engage with these agencies to enforce any protections.

MNA understands that its members enjoy the protection of collective bargaining rights and as such, have a level of protection in speaking out, not necessarily felt or afforded to all nurses. As such, understanding some concern for retaliation may exist, we remind nurses and other healthcare workers facing similar circumstances that OSHA (Occupational Safety Health Agency) is available to file complaints in order to enforce a safe work environment. A complaint can be filed anonymously with OSHA.

Summary

The MNA is committed to protecting the health and safety of our nurses during this global pandemic and in the years that follow. We do not want your future health to be impacted by potential health conditions that may be linked to these questionable practices. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic reuse of personal protective equipment was ***NEVER recommended or considered as a safe practice***. In fact, one-time utilization was the ***ONLY*** agreed upon, evidence-based standard. The MNA stands with you and will continue to fight for your health and safety today and every day.

References:

Federal Drug Administration. (2020). Report adverse events, including problems with test performance or results, to Med-Watch by submitting the online FDA Form 3500. Retrieved from: <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/medwatch/index.cfm?action=reporting>

National Nurses United. (2020) Nurse Alert: Report All Issues with Decontaminated N95 Respirators. Retrieved from: https://act.nationalnursesunited.org/page/-/files/graphics/0420_COVI_N95_Decontamination_Alert.pdf