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# FAQs on using single use/ disposable FFP3 respiratory protective equipment (RPE) for hospital staff

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- NCC/ NHPRC and other PHW response staff
- Public (via corporate website)

**Purpose and summary of document:**

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to frequently asked questions about using single use/ disposable FFP3 respiratory protective equipment (RPE) for hospital staff.

**Document location:** [Website](#)

## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to frequently asked questions about using single use/ disposable FFP3 respiratory protective equipment (RPE) for hospital staff.

## 2 Questions and answers

- 2.1 Why are there different supplies of the FFP3 respirators (masks)?
- 2.2 Why may the FFP3 masks have a different expiry date?.....
- 2.3 Why do I need to be 'Fit tested' again with a different model of FFP3 respirator mask?.....
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### 2.1 Why are there different supplies of the FFP3 respirators (masks)?

Due to ongoing demand in the use of FFP3 masks due to COVID-19, NWSSP procurement is using supplies from different sources.<sup>1</sup> They offer the same level of protection but are a different design and model.

### 2.2 Why may the FFP3 masks have a different expiry date?

Some products may appear to have out-of-date 'use by/expiration' dates or have re labelled 'use by/expiration' dates. Please be assured that products we are issuing have passed stringent tests that demonstrate they are safe.

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<sup>1</sup> FFP2 masks will only be used when there are extreme shortages of FFP3 masks. HSE require FFP3 to be worn in the UK for aerosol exposure.

Any that do not meet the EU standard are destroyed and are not distributed to Health Boards/Trusts.

### **2.3 Why do I need to be 'Fit tested' again with a different model of FFP3 respirator mask?**

The performance of tight-fitting face pieces depends on achieving a **good contact between the wearer's skin and the face seal of the face piece**. Each model of FFP3 mask is slightly different in its fit to each individual face. The only way to ensure that it will protect you is to repeat the [Fit test](#) again with each model of mask provided.

The process to fit check is required **every** time you use a mask (see 2.5 for how to fit check).

### **2.4 Can I wear an FFP3 respirator without Fit testing?**

The masks are only protective if you have been Fit Tested and trained in the correct method of application. Safe donning and doffing is essential to prevent self-contamination.

Fit testing is a requirement by the HSE.

PPE is just one of the hierarchy of controls in the prevention of COVID-19 and includes hand washing, social distancing, enhanced cleaning and ventilation.

### **2.5 How often should I be Fit tested?**

**Provided your face shape has not changed including** weight changes, dental or facial surgery, facial hair/moles/growths in the seal area, it is not necessary to repeat the test more frequently.

Frequency of fit testing is determined by local policy and risk area but check with the IP&C team. Always Do a [Fit-check](#) retest if in doubt!

### **2.6 When should I use FFP3 masks?**

FFP3 masks are only required when managing a patient/client who is undergoing an [Aerosol Generating Procedure \(AGP\)](#) in an amber or red pathway or when caring for a group of patients undergoing AGP's in the same area e.g. AGP hotspots. For all other patients, an FRSM provides effective and adequate protection from the main route of transmission i.e. droplet.

AGP procedures generates aerosols ( $\leq 5\mu\text{m}$ ) that can result in exposure to aerosol viral particles. FFP3 respirators filter at least 99% of airborne particles when worn correctly.

## **2.7 We work in an area that is seeing symptomatic & asymptomatic patients and we want to wear an FFP3 mask but do not have access to them?**

**FFP3 masks are only required when managing a patient/client who is undergoing an [Aerosol Generating Procedure \(AGP\)](#) in an amber or red pathway or when caring for a group of patients undergoing AGP's in the same area e.g. AGP hotspots.**

For all other patients, an FRSM provides effective and adequate protection from the main route of transmission i.e. droplet.

## **2.8 How long can FFP3 masks be worn for?**

FFP3 masks are rigorously tested to ensure they remain effective. Provided the seal remains intact, they can be worn comfortably for at least an hour but are effective for longer unless compromised, e.g. splashed with body fluids or damp with respiration. Please refer to the manufacturers' guidance for maximum duration.

A FFP3 mask can be worn for a session of care<sup>2</sup>, remembering to change other PPE between patients and performing hand hygiene.

Dispose of your FFP3 and other PPE in an orange bag (category B waste).

[Quick guide to donning and doffing](#)

## **2.9 We are running short of FFP3 masks how are we to manage our patients safely?**

There are currently no national shortages of FFP3 masks. You should speak to your line manager with any concerns about supply.

## **2.10 What is the difference between a valved and un-valved FFP3 mask?**

There are 3 main designs of disposable FFP3 respirators:

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<sup>2</sup> Sessional use relates to a period of time including providing care for more than one patient (cohorting).

1. **exhalation valve** - are more comfortable for the user over longer periods of wear
2. **shrouded exhalation valve** - gives more protection to the valve from ingress of droplet/aerosol
3. **un-valved** - are less comfortable for the wearer over longer periods of wear

FFP3 respirators are not fully fluid-resistant and a full face visor must be worn when performing AGP's to protect the wearer from splash/aerosol or ingress via the valve and protect the patient from droplets of the wearer (source control) in relation to COVID-19 **virus**.

It is recommended that Healthcare worker/ operator should wear an un-valved mask when performing sterile procedures requiring maximal barrier precautions e.g. surgical ANTT. This is to prevent **bacteria** in unfiltered breath falling onto a sterile field e.g. wound or site to prevent surgical site infection (SSI) non-COVID related.

### **2.11 What if I failed fit testing on all models of disposable FFP3?**

You manager and Infection Prevention team will need to discuss alternatives:

1. How to improve fit
2. Consider other models to test if available
3. Consider reusable respirators (if appropriate and necessary to perform your role).

### **2.12 Do I need to wear an FFP3 mask due to new variants emerging?**

Even with new variants, the route of transmission has not changed and therefore the same level of protective equipment is recommended in accordance with [UK guidance](#).

FRSM provides effective and adequate protection from the main route of transmission i.e. droplet.

FFP3 is only required for AGP.