National N95 Mask Shortage: Conservation Measures

There is a national shortage of N95 respirators. Northwestern Medicine is closely monitoring supply and use of our current stock and is working to obtain an alternative respirator. There is a plan to conserve the supply by limiting use to situations in which the N95 is the only appropriate form of respiratory protection. Please review these guidelines and contact Infection Prevention with any questions.

When should an N95 mask be worn?
• Caregiver has been fit tested.
• Caregiver is directly caring for a patient who is in airborne infectious isolation or is performing other activities (such as aerosolizing procedures) in which an N95 respirator is indicated.

Can the same mask be reused?
• Yes, when caring for the same patient during the same shift, unless they are on contact and airborne precautions. Label it and leave it in the anteroom.
• Do not reuse the mask if it becomes compromised (i.e., soiled, torn, wet).

ALSO, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Limit the staff entering airborne infectious isolation (AII) rooms to the following:
   • Attending physician
   • Consultants: One attending/fellow per consulting service
   • Fellow/resident: One per shift
   • Clinical nurse: One per shift
   • Patient care technician: One per shift
   • Respiratory therapist: One per shift
   • Housekeeper: One per day
   • Social Work, Case Management: To the extent possible, use phone or other communication technology to have discussions with the patient. If this is not possible, limit visits to one per day.
   • Facilities: One engineer or maintenance person per day, for emergency repairs only.
   • Physical/occupational therapist: One per day

Patient food trays should be delivered and picked up by the assigned nurse. Food Services will obtain patient’s meal orders over the phone. In addition, blood draws, unless it is for microbiology cultures, should be performed by the patient’s nurse. Students, observers, and other non-essential personnel should not enter rooms of patients in AII.

2. Limit the number of staff entering the operating room/procedure room during procedures requiring N95 respirators to the following:
   • Surgeon/attending
   • Assistant (fellow, resident, other)
   • Anesthesia attending/fellow/resident/nurse anesthetist (one)
   • Scrub nurse
   • Circulating nurse
Students, observers, sales representatives/vendors and other non-essential personnel should not participate in the procedure.

If you need further guidance or have any questions regarding N95 respirator conservation, please contact Infection Prevention or Corporate Health.