

# SEIU Healthcare's Position on the Decontamination and Reuse of the N95 Respirator Mask

**ISSUE:** Healthcare employers are not considering best practices for Infection Prevention and Control when distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline healthcare workers. Instead, employers are choosing to ration supplies, placing our members at a higher risk for exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

## SEIU Healthcare's Position:

- We are advocating on behalf of our members to ensure that when the healthcare worker conducts a Point-of-Care Risk Assessment (PCRA) and determines that they need to increase their PPE, that the employer will provide access to the appropriate PPE, inclusive of the N95 respirator mask.
- We do not recommend that PPE (including the N95 respirator mask) be decontaminated and then reused as standard care, as per various international authorities and manufacturer guidelines. Wherever possible, the N95 respirator mask use can be extended which is always preferential to decontamination and reuse.
- There is a lack of peer-reviewed data supporting the effectiveness of decontamination methods specifically against COVID-19 pathogens on an N95 respirator mask. Until such evidence is demonstrated, SEIU Healthcare can not support the decontamination of N95 masks for reuse in any healthcare setting.
- Employers must be transparent regarding their process for the preservation, use, and re-use of N95 respirator masks. SEIU Healthcare adamantly calls on all employers to be transparent with their N95 decontamination and reuse procedures and practices.
- Decontaminated N95 masks should not be worn by healthcare workers when performing or present for an aerosol-generating procedure on a presumptive or positive COVID-19 case.
- The reuse of N95 masks increases the risk of contact transmission and therefore should not be done by HCWs who provide direct patient care to both positive COVID-19 patients and other patients.
- We encourage our members to discard their respirators, new or otherwise, in these instances:
  - » The following use during aerosol-generating procedures.
  - » Contaminated with blood, respiratory or nasal secretions, or other bodily fluids from patients.
  - » Following close contact within two meters (six feet), or exit from, the care area of any patient co-infected with an infectious disease requiring contact precautions.
  - » If damaged or becomes hard to breathe through.
- We cannot support the use of expired N95 masks or any other expired PPE without the consultation and agreement of the Joint Health and Safety Committee and the union.
- SEIU Healthcare does NOT recommend decontamination and reuse strategies for nursing homes, retirement homes, and home and community care settings due to their lack of stringent administrative controls and the nature of their work.