

## Using the Right Dust Mask

### Do I need a dust mask when cleaning up and removing debris?

Use an N95 dust mask whenever you do work that produces dust, such as removing and cutting wallboard/sheetrock, doing demolition work, sweeping up debris or removing mold. Wearing an N95 mask reduces the risk of breathing in dust and mold and protects the lungs if properly used.

N95 dust masks must be worn correctly and have a tight seal against the face to provide full protection. See the manufacturer's instructions on use and seal check procedures. N95 masks do not protect against gases or vapors from cleaners, disinfectants, paints, oil spills or gas-powered tools. They also do not protect against asbestos.

Employers that handle flood clean up and repair work may be required to have a formal respirator program, including training, fit-testing and medical clearance, and provide respirators to workers. For more information, visit [osha.gov](https://www.osha.gov).

### Where can I get an N95 dust mask?

- Most supply, home improvement and hardware stores sell N95 dust masks. Look for the N95 or National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health ("NIOSH") label on the respirator or packaging.
- Do not use surgical masks or dust masks without an N95 or other NIOSH label when doing dust-producing work or removing mold. These masks do not fit tightly and dust can get in around the mask edges.

### How do I use an N95 dust mask?

The mask must have a tight seal against your face in order to provide full protection. It will not work if any air leaks in around the mask edges. Facial hair may prevent the mask from fitting properly.

1. Check the mask for tears or damage. If the mask is folded, fully pull apart the folds by the chin and nose sections of the mask carefully with your fingers.



Cup-style N95 dust mask



Foldable N95 dust mask

2. Position the mask on your face, with fingertips over the nosepiece. Allow the straps to hang freely below your hand.
3. Place the mask under your chin with the nosepiece up. Pull the top strap over your head, resting it high at the back of your head. Pull the bottom strap over your head and position it around the neck and below the ears. Be sure not to crisscross the straps.
4. Make sure the mask covers your mouth and nose.
5. If there is a metal nose strip, use fingertips from both hands to form the nose strip to the shape of your nose.
6. Check the seal of the mask to your face before each use. Put both hands completely over the front of the mask and take a quick, deep breath in and out (pictured right).
  - The mask is properly worn if no air escapes from the mask. It should slightly collapse when breathing in and slightly bulge when breathing out.
  - If you feel air blowing around your face or eyes, re-adjust the nosepiece and straps and check the seal again.
  - If the mask has an exhalation valve (pictured left), check the seal by covering your hands over the mask and valve and breathe in sharply. The mask is sealed if it collapses slightly and no air comes in around the edges. If you feel air escaping, readjust the nosepiece and straps and test again until the mask is sealed.
  - If you CANNOT get a proper fit, try a different size or model.
7. When you are finished, carefully remove it by the straps.
8. Wash hands and face after removing.
  - Disposable N95 masks can be reused if the mask is not wet, dirty or damaged and you can get a tight seal.
  - If you have trouble breathing or have any other trouble when wearing a mask for clean-up work, stop working and contact your healthcare provider.



### **Can I use other types of dust masks when cleaning up mold and debris?**

Yes, but only NIOSH labeled dust masks should be used. In addition to a variety of disposable dust masks, reusable half-face or full-face respirators with disposable filters can be used. See the manufacturer's instructions for use and seal check procedures.



If you use a reusable half-face or full-face respirator, it is important to properly clean and store it. Disassemble and clean your mask according to manufacturers' instructions. As with a disposable dust mask, the respirator must have a tight seal against your face in order to provide full protection, which should be checked before each use.

**What other precautions can I take when cleaning up or doing repairs?**

Wear protective gear, including goggles or safety glasses with side shields, heavy-duty work gloves, a long-sleeve shirt, jeans or work pants and boots. Shower and wash all clothes after working. Wash your hands and face before eating or drinking.

**For more information or assistance, call 311.**

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