# Understanding the Difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>COVID-19 CDC Recommendations</th>
<th>Pre-COVID-19 CDC Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cloth Face Covering</strong></td>
<td>Recommended by CDC to help slow the spread of COVID-19</td>
<td>Reusable. Routinely wash in washing machine depending on the frequency of use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surgical Mask</strong></td>
<td>Cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)</td>
<td>Disposable. Discard after each patient encounter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N95 Respirator</strong></td>
<td>Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH as per the requirements in 42 CFR Part 84*</td>
<td>Ideally should be discarded after each patient encounter and after aerosol-generating procedures. It should also be discarded when it becomes damaged or deformed; no longer forms an effective seal to the face; becomes wet or visibly dirty; breathing becomes difficult; or it becomes contaminated with blood, respiratory or nasal secretions, or other bodily fluids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator</strong></td>
<td>Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH as per the requirements in 42 CFR Part 84</td>
<td>Reusable and must be cleaned/disinfected and stored between each patient interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Testing and Approval**
- Surgical Mask: Cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- N95 Respirator: Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH as per the requirements in 42 CFR Part 84.
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH as per the requirements in 42 CFR Part 84.

**Intended Use and Purpose**
- Surgical Mask: Fluid resistant and provides the wearer protection against large droplets, splashes, or sprays of bodily or other hazardous fluids. Protects the patient from the wearer’s respiratory emissions.
- N95 Respirator: Reduces wearer’s exposure to particles including small particle aerosols and large droplets (only non-oil aerosols).
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: Reusable device made of synthetic or rubber material.

**Face Seal Fit**
- Surgical Mask: Loose-fitting
- N95 Respirator: Tight-fitting
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: Tight-fitting

**Fit Testing Requirement**
- Surgical Mask: No
- N95 Respirator: Yes
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: Yes

**Designed for Reuse**
- Surgical Mask: No
- N95 Respirator: No
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: Yes

**User Seal Check**
- Surgical Mask: No
- N95 Respirator: Yes. Required each time the respirator is donned (put on)
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: Yes. Required each time the respirator is donned (put on)

**Filtration**
- Surgical Mask: Does NOT provide the wearer with a reliable level of protection from inhaling smaller airborne particles and is not considered respiratory protection.
- N95 Respirator: Filters out at least 95% of airborne particles including large and small particles.
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: May be equipped with filters that block 95%, 99%, or 100% of very small particulates. Also may be equipped to protect against vapors/gases.

**Leakage**
- Surgical Mask: Leakage occurs around the edge of the covering when user inhales.
- N95 Respirator: Leakage occurs around the edge of the mask when user inhales.
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: When properly fitted and donned, minimal leakage occurs around edges of the respirator when user inhales.

**Use Limitations**
- Surgical Mask: Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH as per the requirements in 42 CFR Part 84.
- N95 Respirator: Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH as per the requirements in 42 CFR Part 84.
- Elastomeric Half Facepiece Respirator: Evaluated, tested, and approved by NIOSH as per the requirements in 42 CFR Part 84.

*As of July 2, 2018, NIOSH evaluates N95 FFRs intended for use in healthcare for biocompatibility, flammability, and fluid resistance to ensure conformity to relevant standards during the approval process. These tasks were previously performed by the FDA.

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**Resources:**
- Hospital Respiratory Protection Program Toolkit
- Implementing Hospital Respiratory Protection Programs: Strategies from the Field
  [https://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/Implementing_Hospital_RPP_2-19-15.pdf](https://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/Implementing_Hospital_RPP_2-19-15.pdf)