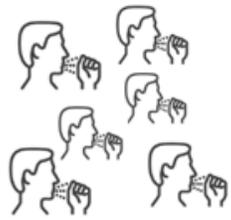


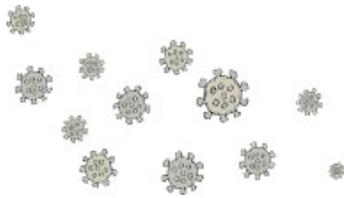
## The Difference between Respirators and Surgical Masks When Dealing with Airborne Exposures to Biohazards

Both devices help prevent the spread of infection but focus on different methods.

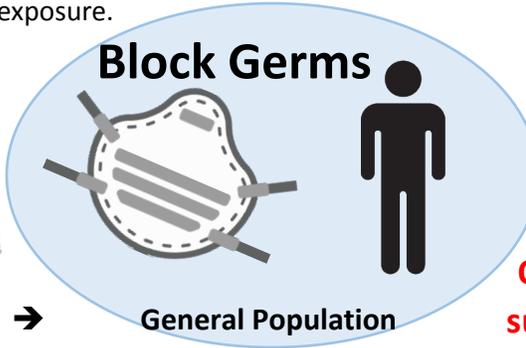
**Respirators:** Devices designed to help provide the wearer with respiratory protection against inhalation of a hazardous atmosphere. For bioaerosols, particulate-removing respirators are often recommended to help reduce exposure.



Infected People



Infectious Germs



General Population

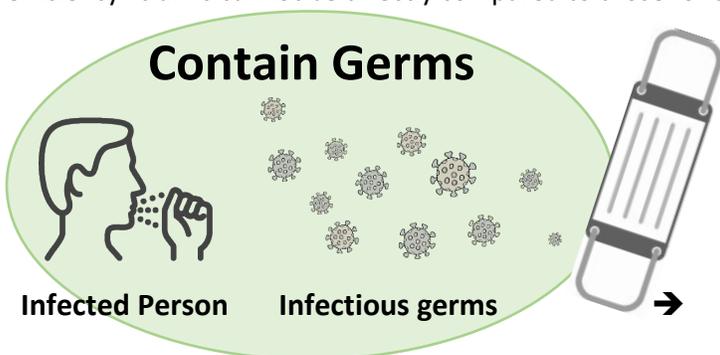
Don't forget OSHA's medical evaluation and fit testing requirements regarding respiratory protection!

**Only use respirators & surgical respirators that are NIOSH certified.**

Where workers are required by employers to wear respirators, they must be NIOSH-certified. It is important to medically evaluate workers to ensure that they can perform work tasks while wearing a respirator. It is important to note that respirators help reduce exposure to airborne contaminants but do not prevent the inhalation of all particles. As a result, when properly selected, used and maintained, respirators can lower exposures to concentrations considered safe for most non-biological particles. However, they do not eliminate the risk of exposure, infection or illness since for biological particles, safe exposure levels have not been established.

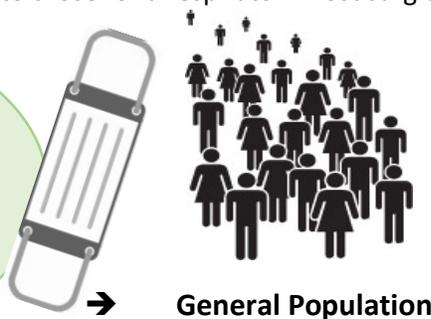
**Surgical Masks:** Infection control devices designed to help prevent the spread of infection from the wearer's

exhaled breath to potentially susceptible persons. They also protect the user from hazards, such as splashes of large droplets of blood or body fluids. A surgical mask may help reduce contamination of the environment by providing a barrier for large droplets expelled by the wearer. However, since surgical masks are not tested the same as respirators any "filtration efficiency" claims cannot be directly compared to those for a respirator. Most surgical masks are not designed to seal tightly



Infected Person

Infectious germs



General Population

to the face, and research has shown that they do not achieve the level of contaminant reduction provided by a NIOSH-approved respirator. Only surgical masks that are cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Admin. to be legally marketed in the United States have been tested for their ability to resist blood and body fluids.

In a few cases, an approved respirator may also have the attributes of a surgical mask. These are sometimes referred to as "**Surgical N95 Respirators.**" This means it can help block large droplets expelled by the wearer, but has also been shown to have efficacy at filtering smaller particles and is designed to fit tightly to the face. For details see the [Quest's Coronavirus page](#), [3M's Respiratory Protection for Airborne Exposures to Biohazards- Release 2, January 2018](#) and [OSHA FactSheet: Respiratory Infection Control: Respirators versus Surgical Masks](#).

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