NYSNA HEALTH & SAFETY FACT SHEET

WHAT IS YOUR FACILITY DOING TO PREPARE FOR THE NEXT COVID WAVE?

MOMENTUM BUILDS AROUND ALTERNATIVE RESPIRATOR USE IN HOSPITALS

As a range of issues continue to unfold around healthcare industry over-dependence on N95 respirators, more facilities are taking steps to pilot and deploy alternate equipment.

Elastomeric Use Expanding

Some facilities using or incorporating the equipment include:

- **West Virginia University Medicine**
- **Bronx VA Hospital**
- **Christiana Care Health System**
- **Hartford Healthcare**
- **Allegheny Health Network**
- **Interfaith Hospital Medical Center**
- **Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center**
- **Staten Island University Hospital (for staff who do not fit N95s)**
- **University of Colorado Hospital**
- **Brookdale Hospital**

FDA Affirms Elastomeric Respirators as an Alternative

The FDA in August reaffirmed its recommendation that healthcare facilities include elastomeric equipment in their respirator options: "What to use: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Approved Air Purifying Respirators (includes those that are FDA-cleared and authorized under the EUA such as disposable filtering facepiece respirators (FFRs) (such as N95s) and reusable respirators such as elastomeric and powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs)."Considerations for Selecting Respirators for Your Health Care Facility, August 18, 2020/FDA release.

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For more information contact:
healthandsafety@nysna.org

New York State NURSES ASSOCIATION

NYSNA OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY
Safe Nurses, Safe Patients, Safe Workplace.

PAPR Use in Healthcare on the Rise

The use of PAPR equipment is also on the increase. Vendors, including RPB and others, report that more facilities nationwide, including some in New York State are ordering PAPRs for use in their hospitals. Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPRs) come with a hood or full face mask and use a small blower to move air through a filter and into the breathing space of the wearer.

Innovation and Open Source Options

Manufacturers continue to innovate. At least one major manufacturer, MSA, is designing elastomeric respirators that eliminate the exhalation valve and include a speaking mechanism. A consortium called Open Standard Respirator has developed and is awaiting NIOSH approval for a reusable filtering respirator. Designs for PAPRs are also continuing to evolve, with smaller less cumbersome units becoming available and a new manufacturing start-up, USA Respirator, is getting established at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

NYS and the 90-Day Rule

In July 2020 the New York State Department of Health amended a rule in order to make healthcare employers responsible for having a 90-day supply of all PPE, in order to be prepared for a resurgence of COVID-19 in the state. While requiring employers to have PPE is a no-brainer, a number of issues bump into this move by the state. Failing to address the potential for alternative sources of PPE can lead to a number of problems. Employers may either fail to meet the 90-day requirement or use unsafe methods to attempt to adhere to it (saving used respirators or "reprocessing" used respirators). Some employers may use this as a reason to reduce use of respirators currently in order to meet the 90-day requirement.

These and other related issues could be avoided if they state put in place two measures:

- Encourage the use of alternative respiratory equipment, such as elastomeric filtering respirators, and powered air purifying respirators.
- Encourage increased production of PPE in New York State. Models initiated at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, such as the production of face shields during the crisis and a new PAPR manufacturing facility, could be supported and expanded to other manufacturing zones.

What's Holding Others Back?

Still, major hospitals and systems continue to balk at using alternatives to build more resilience into their PPE programs. If small embattled safety net hospitals, like Interfaith or Kingsbrook, or embattled VA's like the one in the Bronx, can move in this positive direction, why aren't major systems, like Montefiore, doing the same? Good question!

Cost is certainly not the reason. According to COVID Courage, a non-profit helping to advocate for elastomeric and PAPR use, facilities can get return on their investment within months, and possibly even weeks. The cost of N95s, per worker, per day, can be up to $150 during the pandemic. The one-time cost of an elastomeric respirator is $40-$50, and they can last for years and for thousands of shifts and care sessions.

NIOSH Calls for Input from Healthcare Employers

The National Institute on Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is also placing a focus on elastomerics. They have posted a Request for Information, asking that employers send comments on two questions:

- Would they be interested in receiving and using elastomeric equipment?
- Do they have comments on the logistics of using them?

While it is not exactly clear what will come of this at this point, it is important that NIOSH receive comments. Within NYSNA, we can raise this with management, provide info on how to respond, and ask them to send comments. Let us know if you're interested in getting your facility to participate by emailing **healthandsafety@nysna.org**. **The deadline to submit comments is October 14, 2020.**