

## Medical Evaluation of Respirator Users for Pesticides Information for Physicians & Other Licensed Healthcare Providers



When use of a respirator is required by the pesticide label, both commercial applicator and agricultural employers must provide pesticide handlers a medical evaluation per Occupational Safety and Health Act Respiratory Protection regulations at [OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134\(e\)](#) to determine their ability to safely use the respirator specified. *This includes filtering facepiece respirators (FFR), such as N95s.* Under OSHA's regulations, medical evaluations are required for voluntary use of a respirator in the workplace, with the exception of FFR.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Revised Worker Protection Standard requires that agricultural employers and/or their family members also receive a medical evaluation if they will be using label-required respiratory protection. Medical evaluation must be completed prior to fit testing, or use of the respirator for the first time.

Medical eligibility must be determined by a physician or other licensed health care provider (referred to as a "PLHCP") that is permitted to perform respirator medical evaluations of individuals. OSHA defines a PLHCP as a "person whose legally permitted scope of practice (i.e., license, registration, or certification) allows them to independently provide, or be delegated to provide, some or all of the health care services required by OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard.

The employer must provide a PLHCP who is licensed in the state in which they are practicing. It is state law that determines the legal scope of practice. Licensing rules vary from state to state. **In New Jersey**, for example, Physician Assistants may perform these medical evaluations independently provided that they are under the direct supervision of a physician licensed by the State Board of Medical Examiners (BME).

OSHA outlines all information required to be obtained by the PLHCP for medical evaluation in its "Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire" [[Appendix C to 1910.134](#)]. The questionnaire is designed to identify general medical conditions that place employees who use respirators at risk of serious medical consequences, and includes questions addressing these conditions. Such medical conditions include seizures, diabetes, respiratory disorders and chronic lung disease, and cardiovascular problems. The information contained in an employee's medical evaluation questionnaire are considered medical records, and as such are confidential.

PLHCPs must perform a medical evaluation of a pesticide handler's eligibility to wear a respirator by one of the following: 1) using the questionnaire; 2) performing an initial medical examination that obtains the same information; 3) OR a PLHCP may make a determination using both. The medical questionnaire does not have to be in the same format as Appendix C. The form can be converted to a scannable format, and the form can be tailored with additional questions.



**FIGURE 1 OSHA INFOSHEET RESPIRATOR  
MEDICAL EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE**

Various companies provide online medical evaluations of respirator wearers as required per 1910.134. These evaluations use a web-based interactive questionnaire that is evaluated by a PLHCP, some with an expanded version of the OSHA Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire.

The PLHCP's medical evaluation must also consider the specific conditions of the respirator use(s):

- 1) type and weight of the respirator(s) to be worn
- 2) duration and frequency of respirator use
- 3) expected physical work effort
- 4) use of protective clothing and equipment to be worn; and
- 5) temperature and humidity extremes that may be encountered.

This information must be provided to the PLHCP by both commercial applicator businesses and agricultural employers. If a handler will be expected to use more than one type of respirator, the employer must include all types and conditions of use to the PLHCP to evaluate in their determination of medical eligibility. Commercial pesticide applicator businesses would also provide the PLHCP with copies of the company's respiratory protection program and the OSHA respiratory standard [29 CFR 1910.134].

Regardless of whether the questionnaire itself and/or exam is used, the PLHCP can require a follow-up with medical tests, consultations, or diagnostic procedures necessary to make a medical determination of the employee's eligibility to safely wear the respirator(s) under the conditions of use specified.

The PLHCP then makes a medical determination per OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134(e)(6)(i) regarding the pesticide handler's ability to use the respiratory protection specified. The PLHCP's written recommendation (often called a medical clearance) must be limited to, but include:

- 1) any limitations on respirator use related to the medical condition of the handler
- 2) any limitations on respirator use relating to the workplace conditions in which the respirator will be used
- 3) a statement regarding whether or not the person is medically able to use the respirator
- 4) the need, if any, for follow-up medical evaluations; and
- 5) a statement that the PLHCP has provided the handler with a copy of the PLHCP's written recommendation.

Annual medical evaluations are not explicitly required by either OSHA or EPA. However, the evaluating PLHCP may include a reevaluation requirement in their written recommendation. And, company respiratory protection plans may require periodic reevaluation for continued respirator use by the employee. Additional medical evaluations would be required for continued respirator use, in specific instances as outlined in OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134(e)(7). Some instances include changes in workplace conditions, or reported signs or symptoms directly related to their ability to use a respirator.

The PLHCP letter of medical determination should be kept as record that the pesticide handler is medically cleared to use the respirator(s) as specified. For commercial applicators, OSHA requires (per [29 CFR 1910.1020](#)) that employers retain such records for the employee's length of employment, plus thirty years; this is not required if the employee has been employed for less than a year. The Revised WPS requires that the PLHCP written recommendation be maintained by agricultural employers on the establishment for two years.

Always follow state, tribal, or local regulations when they are more stringent. When state, tribal, or local regulations are more stringent, they take precedence over federal and must be followed. *New Jersey pesticide regulations N.J.A.C. 7:30-12.20(c)9i-iv. adopted on April 6, 2019, are more stringent requiring that agricultural employers retain the medical clearance letter on file at the establishment for three years.*

---

*Excerpted from: Rutgers Cooperative Extension Bulletin E372. EPA's Worker Protection Standard (WPS) Respiratory and Recordkeeping Requirements for Agricultural Employers of Pesticide Handlers. February 23, 2022. Hastings. Patricia. URL: <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.php?pid=E372>.*

*Please contact Pat Hastings if you have any questions at 848-932-0176 or by email at [pdh@rutgers.edu](mailto:pdh@rutgers.edu).*