

TB FACT SHEET: RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

WHY respirators?

TB is spread by airborne droplets that can remain airborne as long as 4 hours. Workers are at risk when they breathe contaminated air from those known to have active TB or undiagnosed individuals. Infectious droplets created by the coughing or sneezing of these individuals may contain TB bacterium and are typically 1-5 microns in size. When workers are in the presence of TB contaminated air, they should wear respiratory protection to filter out the bacterium.

WHO should wear respirators?

Health care, correctional, long term care for the elderly, drug treatment and homeless shelter workers exposed to known or suspected* TB individuals. Doctors and dental offices are not covered by these requirements unless high hazard procedures such as cough inducing are being performed. The number of workers exposed in many cases may be reduced by altering work practices.

WHAT respirators to use?

A NIOSH-approved high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) respirator is the minimum level of protection required during exposure because they are 99.97% efficient in capturing particles that are 0.3 microns or larger. Disposable types can be used. The employer should specify end-of-use criteria for disposable respirators to indicate when the respirator is no longer structurally or functionally sound.

HOW to create a respiratory protection program?

Whenever a respirator is required to protect a Michigan worker from a recognized hazard, a complete program is necessary as specified in Rule 3502. A respiratory protection program's key features are as follows:

1. A written program describing the proper use of the respirators and the program's scope.
2. Respirator fit testing to demonstrate the actual ability to provide protection provided.
3. Equipment maintenance, storage and cleaning procedures.
4. Employee training on use and limitations.
5. Routine inspections of equipment.
6. Medical surveillance and monitoring of employee health is recommended.

When Should TB Respiratory Protection be Provided?

The minimum level of respirator protection must be provided by March 1, 1994.

1. During times when employees enter rooms housing known or suspected active TB individuals. Housing can be temporary with intent to transfer to a more permanent facility.
2. During the performance of high-risk procedures that increase the generation of airborne droplets. This includes induced coughing for sputum collection and culture.
3. By emergency medical response personnel or others when they must transport a known or suspected active TB patient in a closed vehicle.

For further information contact the Division of Occupational Health at (517) 335-8250

* The employer must define and establish criteria for identifying suspected TB individuals. A suspected TB individual is one who is seriously ill with symptoms consistent with TB.