

TO: Adult day services, Assisted Living Facilities, Visiting Nurses Services, Correctional and Detention Facilities, Dental Facilities, Dialysis Facilities, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Police Forces, Fire Departments, Hospitals, Inpatient Psychiatric Care Facilities, Nursing Homes, Primary Care and Community Health Centers, Therapeutic Community Residence and Recovery Facilities,

FROM: William Irwin, Sc.D., Health and Medical Branch Co-Director, State Emergency Operations Center

Guidance on N95 Respirator Sterilization in Your Region

Note: This Health Advisory is superseded by a [Health Advisory issued January 5, 2021](#).

***Updated May 27, 2020:** This message has been updated to correct the phone number for Brattleboro Memorial Hospital contact and correct the name of North Country Hospital.*

This message is for those who use respiratory protection in Vermont for health care purposes during the COVID-19 response. There is a global shortage of N95 respirators. This shortage is expected to last into the coming months.

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

As Vermont works to preserve the supply of N95 respirators, your facilities' and emergency services' respiratory protection programs should implement safe mitigation strategies to help preserve supply:

- **New respiratory protection users must be fit tested to only respirators for which you have sufficient supply** for immediate and longer-term needs. Fit testing for N95 respirators that are in short supply risks having to fit-test users again for other filtering facepiece respirators.
- **Staff may have to be fitted for and use alternatives to N95 respirators**, including KN95 respirators or other comparable respirators as they become available and pass evaluations. The State will supply only alternative respirators verified to provide the required filtration for health protection. Face shields and specific N95 alternative respirators may be used in conjunction to provide effective filtration and splash protection.
- **Use respirators as the last choice in respiratory protection.** Engineering and administrative controls that reduce exposure to hazards must be exhausted first. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention strategies for optimizing the supply of N95 respirators is found [here](#).
- **Ensure that only those who actually need it use a respirator.** Conserve commercially produced surgical masks for hospital or ambulatory care surgical procedures. There are

many people whose work only requires a medical procedure mask or a cloth face covering. Vermont Department of Health guidance for many occupations is found [here](#).

- **Save N95s and get them sterilized at one of eight hospitals providing this local service.** In addition to Northwestern Medical Center’s existing sterilizing unit, the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) has provided seven hospitals with Steris V-Pro low temperature hydrogen peroxide sterilizing units. These units are typically used for sterilizing other medical devices but were recently granted an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to sterilize certain N95 respirators.

The eight hospitals providing sterilization services for N95 respirators are:

Hospital	Point of Contact
Brattleboro Memorial Hospital	Mike Geissler mgeissler@bmhvt.org 802-257-8228
North Country Hospital	Michael Sanville msanville@nchsi.org 802-334-3270
Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital	Pete Tomczyk p.tomczyk@nvrh.org 802-748-7348
Northwest Medical Center	Deirdre Young dyoung@nmcinc.org 802-524-1062
Rutland Regional Medical Center	Brian Olsen bolsen@rrmc.org 802-747-3647
Southwestern Vermont Medical Center	Joy Bull Joy.Bull@svhealthcare.org 802-440-8927 Tanya Cowder Tanya.Cowder@svhealthcare.org 802-442-6361
Springfield Hospital	Jim Smith JimSmith@springfieldmed.org 802-885-7651
University of Vermont Medical Center	Drew Robinson Andrew.Robinson@uvmhealth.org 802-847-4258

Other hospitals not listed above may have similar sterilizer capabilities but are not obligated to sterilize N95 respirators that are used outside their facility, though they may choose to do so independently.

Respirators for sterilization must be very clean – **no writing, no lipstick or other makeup. Facilities may have other guidelines or packaging requirements.**

The Steris system can effectively decontaminate compatible N95 or N95-equivalent respirators (those that do not contain cellulose) up to ten times. The tested and acceptable respirator types to date include the 3M 8000, 8210, 1860, 1860S, 1870P and Moldex 1510Z, 1511, 1512, 1513, 1517, but more models may have been tested for sterilization as well. The FDA EUA and Steris documents state the units may work for all non-cellulose N95 or N95 alternative respirators.

- Discard soiled or damaged respirators in accordance with normal procedures – keep only used respirators that are in good condition. The sterilizing facility may not return all of the respirators if they are too soiled for sterilization or too damaged for reuse.

Manage used, unsterilized respirators for disinfection as biohazardous materials. They must be packaged in accordance with [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\) Bloodborne Pathogen Standards](#) and transported in accordance with applicable U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations. Locally licensed biosafety transportation should be arranged directly with each hospital. If additional assistance is needed, contact the SEOC at 800-347-0488.

Put used respirators together into a biohazard labeled plastic bag, line a box with a large plastic bag and put the bagged respirators into the bag lining the biohazard labeled box. Boxes should be labeled with the sending facility name and point of contact.

- Should you have any questions that cannot be answered working locally, please contact the SEOC at 800-347-0488.

If you have any questions about the Health Alert Network, please contact the HAN Coordinator at 802-859-5900 or vthan@vermont.gov.

HAN Message Type Definitions

Health Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation may not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Info Service Message: Provides general correspondence from VDH, which is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.