

Best Practices to Ensure Hygienic Distribution Under the N95 Respirator Mask Distribution Initiative

Background:

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) is providing U.S. government-purchased N95 respirator masks to designated enrolled providers in the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program, and to participating Pharmacy Network Administrators in the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program for further distribution to enrolled pharmacy providers.

The requirements for designated participating providers in the N95 Respirator Mask Distribution Initiative are set forth in an amendment to the CDC Provider Agreement on the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program Provider Requirements and Support webpage at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/vaccination-provider-support.html>. Participants in the N95 Respirator Mask Distribution Initiative are required to post the notice visible to the public at the site of any Initiative mask distribution utilizing uniform signage provided by HHS. This uniform signage states that up to three free masks are available to every person in the United States.

A portion of the N95 respirator masks provided by the SNS may be individually packaged. However, most will not be individually packaged but will be grouped in larger packages. Since individuals will be limited to three N95 respirator masks each, CDC is providing this technical assistance information to providers so that the N95 respirator masks are distributed to the public using hygienic best practices in order to help reduce the possibility that the masks become contaminated.

General:

- Preferable - Overall handling of the masks as little as possible prior to receipt by the customer.
- Suggested answers to questions a pharmacy may receive -
 - People with severe respiratory impairment (e.g., shortness of breath with minimal exertion or use supplemental oxygen) should consult with a healthcare provider regarding N95 respirator mask usage.
 - Some N95 respirator masks may contain latex in the straps. Individuals with natural rubber latex allergies should consult the manufacturer's website for information about the specific model.

Location:

- Preferable - Distribution of the masks from areas that promote good clinic hygienic practices as required under the CDC Provider Agreement.
- Alternatively - Distribution in another location in the store where N95 respirator masks can be monitored to the maximum extent practicable.

Hygienic Handling:

- General guidance - Any time a staff member touches the N95 respirator masks, hands should be washed or cleansed with hand sanitizer before and after touching masks.
- Preferable - Hand washing before and after a provider or staff member of provider distributes N95 respirator masks to individuals, as well as masking by the provider or staff member distributing the masks.
- Wearing gloves while distributing the masks would also help ensure hygienic distribution.
- Hand sanitizer could be provided for mask recipients to use at the time of mask pick-up.

Storage and Distribution:

- For masks that are not individually packaged, it is preferable to store the masks in a closed container in the provider location prior to distribution.
- Preferable - Distribution of masks by, or in proximity to, a provider or staff member.

