Using respirators with exhalation valves during the COVID-19 pandemic

Respirators with exhalation valves do provide the same level of protection to the wearer as one that does not have a valve; however, they are not recommended to be used as part of COVID-19 precautions because they may not filter virus particles or respiratory droplets that the wearer exhales. This means droplets from the wearer can be released outside the mask, reducing the efficacy of the barrier mask as a COVID-19 public health prevention measure. These exhalation valves are intended to make the respirator more comfortable for the person who is wearing it.

Source control: Respirators with exhalation valves protect the wearer from the virus that causes COVID-19, but may not prevent the virus, spreading from the wearer to others (that is, they may not be effective for source control).

If possible, wear a respirator without an exhalation valve when both source control and respiratory protection are required.

If you must use a respirator with an exhalation valve, the following must be considered:

When working alone, wearing a fit tested respirator with an exhalation valve is acceptable.

When source control is needed: If working in an environment where others are not wearing respirators (e.g., fit tested NIOSH approved disposable filtering facepiece N95, an elastomeric respirator), cover the exhalation valve with a medical mask (e.g. surgical mask, procedure mask), or a non-medical mask that does not interfere with the respirator fit.

Medical grade masks must be worn if physical distancing cannot be consistently maintained.

For the latest information of COVID-19 and the use of masks, please refer to Chapter 6 of the University COVID-19 General Workplace Guidelines: [https://ehs.utoronto.ca/covid-19-information/](https://ehs.utoronto.ca/covid-19-information/)