

F.A.Q. on respirator face-fit testing

Do I have to undergo a face-fit test?

Face - fit testing of persons who wear respirators (masks) that rely on a tight fit (seal) between the respirator and the wearers face in order to provide protection is required in order to comply with the ACOPs to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, the Control of Lead at Work Regulations and the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations. Face-fit testing is therefore a legal requirement.

What does the fit-test consist of?

The test undertaken in this University is a quantitative test and involves the candidate wearing a respirator of the make, model and size that they are to use in the workplace, this is connected to a test machine that counts the particulate in the test room and the particulate within the respirator and calculates, from this information, a fit-factor. For those wearing half-face masks the required fit factor is 100, for those wearing full-facemasks the required fit factor is 2000.

In order to simulate a working regime and the facial movements that may affect the fit of a respirator under normal use the candidate undertakes seven simple exercises of 80 seconds each whilst connected to the machine. These are basically head movements and talking aloud whilst walking on the spot.

What will be required from me when I have a fit test?

If you are a smoker you will be required to refrain from smoking for at least one and a half hours prior to the fit test, this is because the sensitive equipment may detect particulate in exhaled breath which may result in a false failure.

A fit test should not be conducted if you have any facial hair growth in the area where the respirator facepiece seal meets your face. This is because a reliable face seal can only be achieved if you are clean-shaven in the area where the facepiece seal touches your face. You will therefore be asked to present clean-shaven (in the area where the facepiece seal meets your face) for the fit test. You should remember that the same rule applies when you wear your respirator facepiece on a day-to-day basis at work.

Whilst the tests are not physically arduous the tester has a duty of care to those being tested, you will therefore be asked to confirm that you are fit to undertake the tests. Persons with severe asthma, bronchitis or heart disorders may wish to consult the Occupational Health Unit (50 8190) prior to booking a test.

What will happen if I normally wear a full beard and do not wish to shave?

If you are unable to be clean-shaven (in the region of the face seal of a tight fitting mask) for an unavoidable reason (e.g. where a beard is worn for religious reasons, or it is not a contractual obligation to be clean shaven), then your employer should provide you with a suitable loose fitting hood connected to a power pack that provides filtered positive pressure air to the hood. Alternatively, arrangements must be made so that the respiratory risk to your health is either prevented or otherwise adequately controlled.

What if I wear more than one type of respirator?

If you need to wear more than one type of tight-fitting respirator for your job, e.g. a half-face mask respirator and a full-face mask respirator, then you should be fit tested for each type of respirator.

What if I wear prescription spectacles, safety spectacles or safety goggles at work?

If you normally wear prescription spectacles, safety spectacles or goggles with a half-face mask you should wear them during the test.

Spectacles arms will undoubtedly compromise the facial seal on a full-face mask and there are several avenues open to overcome this problem:

- a. As an alternative to spectacles contact lenses can be quite safely worn within a full-face mask as the eyes are fully protected from chemical splash, etc.
- b. Special goggles are available that have a channel for the side arms of spectacles, these can be worn over prescription spectacles and a combination of these goggles and a half-face mask may suffice instead of a full-face mask, if the task in hand does not require a respirator of a higher protection factor than that of a half-face mask.
- c. Special kits are available from the respirator manufacturer that allows specially constructed prescription lenses to be fitted inside the full-face mask. These are relatively expensive but may be the answer for those that wear full-face respirators regularly, or for lengthy periods.
- d. Subject to protection factor requirements a powered hood, similar to that suggested for those wearing facial hair, may be suitable.

What will happen if I fail a fit test?

You will not fail a fit test, but the respirator may! The fit test is testing the suitability and fit of the respirator to your face - you are not being tested.

The fit tester should ask you to refit the respirator and repeat the fit test. If a better fit is not obtained you may be asked to try on a different size or make of respirator and repeat the fit test. You should not use a respirator that does not fit you properly. In the unlikely event that a pass face-fit cannot be achieved at

the time of first appointment the fit tester will inform your School/Unit so that further arrangement can be made to face-fit, or ensure that your School/Unit makes alteration to your work arrangements so that you are not exposed to inhalation hazards.

Who will pay for the fit-test?

As your employer is responsible for your health and safety whilst at work the University will ultimately pay, however the actual payment will come from individual Faculties, Schools, or Units and you should make sure before you come for test that prior arrangement has been made by your Faculty/School/Unit for payment for the test to the Health and Safety Department.

Please note that all 'no shows' will still be charged for a test. If you need to cancel, you must give us 24 hours notice.

How often will I require to be face-fit tested?

It is recommended that those using tight fitting facemasks should be re-tested every three years. However, if any of the statements below apply then you will need to be re-tested before resuming any work using the facepiece.

- You need to change to another type of facepiece;
- If your facial features alter due to weight loss or gain;
- If your facial features alter due to substantial dental work, or
- If you develop facial imperfections (scars, moles, etc) around the face seal area.

What will I be told or given at the end of the test?

When you have completed the fit test you will be told if you have obtained a pass or a fail. A pass means that the tested respirator is suitable for you. Your test results will be uploaded to the COSHH Health Passport System (CHPS) and from there you will be able to log in and find the respirator you were fitted on. If you do not have access to this system please email Facefit.Testing@ed.ac.uk and someone will get back to you with respirator details.

We no longer hand out respirators and filters after testing, details of how to purchase RPE can be found on the RPE webpages.

In the unlikely event that the tester has been unable to secure a pass in the time allotted arrangements will be made to retest, perhaps with a respirator of a different manufacture.

Can I choose which make of respirator that I want?

No, for various reasons, based on comfort, respirator efficiency and cost, that the tester will be able to explain to you at time of test, the University has

rationalised the purchase and supply of respirators to the 3M 7500 series half-face mask, the 3M 6000 series full-face mask and the 3M Jupiter powered hood. Only in exceptional cases where a face-fit pass cannot be achieved on the above will respirators of a different type or manufacture be considered.

For further queries regarding face-fit testing please contact
occupational.hygiene@ed.ac.uk