

RPE Face Fit Testing – information for wearers

All staff must be fit and able to wear respiratory protective equipment (RPE)

Some pre-existing medical conditions (examples include breathing disorders such as asthma, skin allergies, or heart problems) may prevent some wearers from wearing RPE, or certain types of RPE.

It is important that people should also be healthy at the time of fit testing and not suffering from ailments such as cold, flu or similar temporary health conditions.

The purpose of the test

This test is for tight-fitting RPE which relies on making a tight seal around your nose, face, and chin. A fit test checks for compatibility between the RPE and the user.

You will only be protected if the RPE is used and maintained properly. This includes:

- The wearer (where applicable) being clean shaven;
- The wearer using the type of RPE that they have been tested for;
- The mask being suitable for its intended purpose as determined by risk assessment;
- The mask being fitted with the correct filters for the substances it is protecting against;
- That manufacturers advice is followed in respect of filter changes and/or wearing;
- The RPE being stored in a clean, sealed container in between uses.

It is recommended that, as far as reasonably practicable, face seal dependant RPE is not worn continuously for more than one hour with the wearer taking a break between consecutive uses.

Furthermore, it is important that the wearer is clean shaven in the area of the face seal (Figure 1).

The 'right' to have facial hair must be balanced against the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This requires employees to follow the training they have received, take care of their own health and safety and be cooperative with their employer regarding health and safety.

If it is not reasonably practicable for employees to wear face seal dependant RPE (such as where there are religious reasons or health issues), other types of RPE should be considered, such as the use of powered respirators, which do not require a seal with the face.



Figure 1 wearer must be clean shaven in the area of the face seal, taken from BSIF fit2fit companion v2

What will happen during a fit test?

- **Initial sensitivity test:** You will be asked to put on a large hood with a hole in the centre (Figure 2). You need to breathe normally using your mouth with tongue slightly out. Sprays of solution will be introduced inside the hood and you will be asked to indicate if you taste the solution and describe the taste. If you are unsure if you can taste the solution, you should say so at this time.
- **Fit Test:** You will be shown how to correctly fit your RPE and how to carry out a quick check that it is fitted correctly. A similar hood to that used during the initial sensitivity test will be placed over your head and you will be asked to carry out the following exercises for one minute each whilst the same solution is sprayed into the hood at 30 second intervals. The exercises are designed to replicate a range of common situations, and replicate a range of head and face movements that may challenge the fit of the RPE to your face. You will be asked during each exercise to indicate if you taste the solution. Exercises will be demonstrated beforehand.
 - 1) Normal breathing: through the mouth with tongue slightly out.
 - 2) Deep breathing: slowly through the mouth but do not hyperventilate.
 - 3) Turning head side to side: exhale at each side.
 - 4) Moving head up and down: inhale at ceiling, exhale at floor.
 - 5) Talking: we have a set passage for everyone to read from.
 - 6) Bending over: from the hips, slowly.
 - 7) Normal breathing: through the mouth with tongue slightly out.



Figure 2 Qualitative fit test hood, taken from BSIF fit2fit companion v2

It is recommended that a face fit test should be undertaken at least every 2 years, or when there are changes to the make or model of RPE or head worn PPE in use, or changes to the wearer (e.g. significant weight gain/loss, substantial dental work, injury to jaw or nose, facial surgery).

If you require any advice, or have any questions regarding any of the above, please ask your face fit tester at the time of testing, or contact rosiemckay@pragmaandassociates.co.uk