

UPDATED RECOMMENDATION: If you are using TIME as a decontamination strategy for your filtering facepiece respirator, we suggest waiting more than seven days before reuse.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued strategies to optimize the use of filtering facepiece respirators (FFRs), such as N-95s, when they are in short supply. The guidance suggests in crisis situations, a worker could consider storing a used, non-soiled FFR in a breathable paper bag for five days before reuse.^{1,2} The CDC guidance was based on research published March 17, 2020 suggesting a 72-hour survival time for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.³

More recent research published April 2, 2020 suggests SARS-CoV-2 may endure longer than 72 hours, where ‘a detectable level of infectious virus could still be present on the outer layer of a surgical mask on day 7.’⁴ The study showed that one out of 1,000 viral particles survived for this seven-day time period.⁴

Institutions that adopt Time as a decontamination strategy for FFRs are cautioned on the following:

- Expect guidance on this strategy to evolve as more research is completed.
- The maximum number of days at which SARS-CoV-2 is **not detected** on the outer layer of a surgical mask isn’t currently known.
- At this time, seven days is the **minimum** number of days that should be used for this strategy.
- Treat respirators held in bags for any length of time as still likely contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 as well as bacteria, mold, and other pathogens.

The CDC continues to update their strategies to optimize PPE during a shortage:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/index.html>

¹ See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/index.html>

² Specific CDC guidance on decontamination and reuse can be found here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/decontamination-reuse-respirators.html>

³ van Doremalen, N, Morris DH, Holbrook MG, et al., Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV-2 as Compared with SARS-CoV-1. New England Journal of Medicine, 3/17/2020. DOI:10.1056/NEJMc2004973

⁴ Chin AWH, Chu JTS, Perera MRA et al., Stability of SARS-CoV-2 in Different Environmental Conditions. Lancet, 4/2/2020. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2666-5247\(20\)30003-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2666-5247(20)30003-3)