



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Thomas Farley, MD, MPH
Commissioner

Cleaning Up After a Flood: Using the Right Dust Mask

Do I need a dust mask when cleaning up and removing debris?

When working with dust, such as removing and cutting wallboard/sheetrock and other building materials, sweeping up debris or removing mold, it's best to use an N95 dust mask, especially if you're working indoors with poor or no ventilation or the work creates very fine dust. Wearing an N95 dust mask reduces the risk of breathing in dust and mold. *Note:* N95 respirators do not protect against gas or fumes from painting, spills or gas-powered tools.



Organizations or employers that handle flood clean up and repair work may be required to have a formal respirator program in place and provide respirators to workers. For more information, visit [osha.gov](https://www.osha.gov).

Where can I buy an N95 dust mask?

- Most supply, home improvement and hardware stores sell N95 dust masks. Look for N95 on the respirator or packaging.
- Do not use surgical masks or dust masks not labeled N95 when working with dust or removing mold. These masks do not fit tightly and dust can get in around the mask edges.

How do I use an N95 dust mask?

- **Always read and follow the manufacturer's directions.** The respirator must have a tight seal against your face. It will not work if anything leaks in around the sides.
- After it's on and formed to your face, check the fit:



1. Place both hands over respirator.
2. Breathe out sharply.
3. If air leaks are detected, re-adjust the nose piece and straps.
4. Repeat steps 1 and 2 until no air escapes from the mask edge.

- Take off and discard the respirator when you have completed working.
- If you can't get a tight seal, or the respirator gets wet, dirty or damaged, throw it out. Facial hair, such as a beard, may prevent the respirator from fitting properly.
- If you have trouble breathing or have any other trouble when wearing a respirator for clean-up work, stop working and contact your healthcare provider.

What other precautions can I take when cleaning up or doing repairs?

Wear protective gear, including goggles or safety glasses with side shields, heavy-duty work gloves, a long-sleeve shirt, jeans or work pants and boots. Shower and wash all clothes after working. Wash your hands before eating or drinking.

For more information or assistance, visit a NYC Restoration Center near you or call 311.