Are we collecting N95 respirators because we are running out of inventory?

The collection, sanitization, and storage of N95 respirators is a precautionary measure that is intended to ensure the organization continues to have access to critical PPE components regardless of supply considerations. At this time, N95 respirator collection, sanitization, and storage will be performed despite current and continued access to new product. Sanitized N95 respirators will not be distributed for staff use until supply disruptions impact availability to new respirators.

Why have we started reprocessing N95 respirators?

To ensure that frontline staff always have access to critically needed N95 respirators when they are required for patient care.

Why are only the 1870+ N95 respirators being reprocessed?

The 1870+ is the model used by 80% of HCWs in AHS and therefore highest priority for reuse. Other models may be included in later phases, once processes for the 1870+ have been operationalized.

How long will we be sanitizing N95 respirators for staff?

Sanitizing N95 respirators for reuse by healthcare workers is temporary, and limited only to the current emergent pandemic under the direction of the provincial government, MOH, and organizational leadership.

I thought we were not allowed to reuse single use devices?

The reuse of single use devices can only occur in exceptional circumstances, under strict controls, and after Provincial, MOH, and organizational leadership review and approve. This is an exceptional circumstance, and the reuse will only continue as long as the emergent pandemic situation continues.

Is it safe to use N95 respirators that have be sanitized for reuse?

Portacount fit testing has been performed as part of the process development to ensure N95 sanitization will yield a safe product for staff to use.

How are N95 respirators sanitized for reuse?

Respirators are packaged and sanitized in a steam sterilizer using a cycle specifically intended to render the device sanitized, while maintaining performance and integrity.

Will healthcare workers receive they previously used?

At this time there is no process in place for providing the individual healthcare provider their previously used respirator. N95 respirators will be sanitized and provided based on respirator type.
Is it safe for me to handle and sort N95 respirators within the MDR?

The health and safety on our staff is our number one priority. According to current evidence, COVID-19 virus is primarily transmitted between people through respiratory droplets and contact route. As part of routine work in MDR, staff are provided access to established procedures and the PPE required for safe reprocessing practice. This has not changed. The established practices for frequent hand hygiene and appropriate PPE use are sufficient to ensure staff safety.

Why is MDRD staff collecting the buckets and distribution?

Due to the decrease in surgical activity provincially, MDR departments are running at 50 per cent or lower capacity. Throughout the province, teams are being redeployed to support the COVID-19 work effort. With the decrease capacity, the MDRD teams will take on the responsibility of transporting the N95 respirators back to the defined area to help reduce the workload of other team members at the sites.

What PPE do I need to don when handling the respirator?

On March 26, Alberta Health Services (AHS), Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), Covenant Health, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA), and United Nurses of Alberta (UNA), reached a joint agreement on the safe and effective use of personal protection equipment (PPE) in our collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. AHS’ recommendations for appropriate PPE in management of COVID-19 (confirmed and presumptive) patients remains the same. Under the joint agreement, frontline staff will be trusted to make their best clinical decision on the proper type of PPE to use in various situations.

Why steam sterilization?

There are a variety of different methods to sterilize the N95 respirators and are currently being used by other provinces. At AHS, we have made the decision to use steam sterilization on a variety of factors, including availability of equipment, capacity of equipment, and quality of outcome.

Is there any experiments or work being done on the viral load after steam sterilization?

Based on literature, heat at 70° C kills COVID-19, under steam sanitation the N95 respirators are heated to 121 ° C.

Are you looking at other PPE devices to be re-sanitized?

The possibility of using the same process to decontaminate other used PPE is under review.