

OSHA Respirator Form tid-bits for Providers

The information in the medical questionnaire is considered a medical record and, like all medical records, it must not be shared with management personnel. The medical questionnaire clearly states "To maintain your confidentiality, your employer or supervisor must not look at or review your answers, and your employer must tell you how to deliver or send this questionnaire to the health care professional who will review it."

Your employer's Human Resources may have a policy on who may access employee medical records and for what reasons. You should check with your State professional boards to find out if there are any relevant state laws regarding confidentiality of employee medical records. Also, some National and State Health Care Professional organizations like the American Medical Association have ethics statements for healthcare professionals who are members of their organizations in regard to the confidentiality of medical records, and these organizations may serve as resources for you on this issue of confidentiality.

The respiratory protection standard requires an initial medical evaluation to determine the employee's ability to use a respirator before the employee is fit tested or required to use the respirator in the workplace. At a minimum the employer must provide additional evaluations if an employee shows signs or symptoms that are related to their ability to wear a respirator. There is not a specific annual requirement for medical evaluations in the standard. However, the physician or other licensed healthcare provider (PLHCP) may prescribe annual tests to ensure employees' continued ability to wear a respirator.

However, if the PLHCP determines that an employee has a medical condition that places the employee's health at increased risk if a negative pressure respirator is worn, but the employee could wear a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR), then the employer must provide one. OSHA believes many workers who are medically unable to wear a negative pressure respirator will be able to use a PAPR. However, if it is determined that the employee cannot wear a PAPR either, then the employer cannot assign the employee to a position that would require the employee to wear a respirator.

The OSHA Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire is designed to identify general medical conditions that could place a worker at risk of serious medical consequences, if a respirator is used. The medical questionnaire must be administered in a manner that ensures that you understand its content. It's important to answer the questions truthfully.

Your responses to the medical questionnaire are confidential and may not be shared with your employer. Your employer must provide you with an opportunity to discuss the questionnaire and examination results with the physician or licensed healthcare professional.

Before you can be medically evaluated, your employer must also provide the physician or licensed healthcare professional with information about how you will use the respirator at work. For example:

- the type and weight of your respirator;
- how long and how often you will be wearing the respirator;
- how hard you will be working and how much effort will be involved;
- other protective clothing or equipment you will wear during respirator use;
- temperature and humidity extremes at work; along with
- a copy of the OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard and your employer's written respiratory protection program.

The physician or licensed healthcare professional needs this information to properly evaluate your ability to use the respirator.

In many cases, the physician or licensed healthcare professional may make a medical determination on whether you are or are not able to safely wear a respirator, based just on your answers to the questionnaire. But, sometimes the physician or licensed healthcare professional may decide that a follow-up medical examination is necessary to make a final determination. This could include medical tests, consultations, or diagnostic procedures. If you need a follow-up medical examination, your employer is responsible for paying for it and any associated tests. Your employer must also ensure that the follow-up examination and any other medical testing are provided during your normal working hours, or at a time and place that's convenient for you. In addition, your employer must provide you with an opportunity to discuss the questionnaire and examination results with the physician or licensed healthcare professional.

After reviewing the questionnaire or conducting an initial medical examination, or conducting a follow-up medical examination, the physician or licensed healthcare professional will provide you and your employer with a written recommendation. This document must state three things:

- First, whether you are medically able to wear the respirator and if you have any medical limitations for using the respirator;
- Second, the need, if any, for you to have follow-up medical evaluations;
- And, third, a statement that the doctor or licensed healthcare professional has provided you with a copy of their written recommendation.

This written recommendation *cannot* include any confidential medical information about you.