

Dr. Levine's Mask Guidance Crosses the Line

By, Amy Hornblas

Author of *The Vermont Mask Survey*

vtmasksurvey.com

By recommending it's "time to get out the N-95's" again for use during the flood clean-up, Vermont's Health Commissioner Dr. Levine is crossing a serious line. ([7/14/23 Press Conference, @ 22 minutes.](#))

N-95's are considered official "respirators" according to OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). OSHA has an entire set of standards to protect employees who wear them in workplace settings.

OSHA recommends the use of N-95's in order to protect the lungs from mold and dust particles which may be dispersed into the air while doing actions such as demolition of water-damaged materials or using fans in indoor spaces. Their Information Bulletin titled [A Brief Guide to Mold in the Workplace](#) includes information and suggestions which would be of use to residents and employers conducting flood clean-up.

One of the important points the OSHA document contains is this reminder to employers:

*"As specified by OSHA in [29 CFR 1910.134](#) individuals who use respirators [N-95's and Dust Masks] must be **properly trained**, have **medical clearance**, and **be properly fit tested** before they begin using a respirator. In addition, use of respirators requires the employer to **develop and implement a written respiratory protection program**..."*

Medical clearance means conducting a 10 page review of the numerous health and work conditions which may make wearing a respirator more dangerous for that individual.

Fit-tested means the wearer is given a respirator that fits their face tightly, and are **trained** on how to wear it properly, so that it will work.

A **respiratory protection program** is a mutli-step process which assures that employers are doing their best to avoid and/or mitigate the known harms which can be caused by respirator use.

Why so many requirements? Because if they are not used properly, respirators will not work, and can cause an even greater hazard, in and of themselves, according to OSHA. Especially for people with pre-existing conditions, in hot conditions, and those who are wearing them for prolonged periods.

Sound like anybody you know conducting flood clean-up?

Perhaps Dr. Levine's advice around the use of respirators lacks these details because he is not a PPE (*Personal Protective Equipment*) expert. Doctors are trained and supervised in their own PPE use by industrial hygienists and other environmental health and safety professionals, which is a specialty requiring years of training in subjects doctors learn nothing about.

At least this time, Dr. Levine is recommending the appropriate protection: N-95's. This time he is not suggesting people use cloth or medical masks, or inferior K-95's, since it takes a very tight seal, as well as a high-quality product, in order to keep those dust and mold particles out of your lungs.

However, that tight seal comes at a cost. N-95's have a very tight seal that makes it much more difficult to breathe, talk through, and work with one on.

In response to Covid, the [*Center for Disease Control*](#) encourages people to choose other types of masks (cloth or medical) if they find it is too difficult to breathe through an N-95. They also warn that about 60% of the K-95's distributed during Covid were of poor quality. (K-95 is a respirator made in China- it was approved for emergency use in the U.S. to meet the demand during Covid.)

If the masks people have been wearing for the past three years are unable to keep out mold and dust particles because of large gaps and poor quality, then clearly they can't possibly keep out the tiny aerosolized Covid-carrying droplets.

In other words, they never worked for Covid, either.

Perhaps now would be a good time to ask why we've been encouraged to wear "face coverings" in the first place? Countless people are still wearing them- and requiring them of others- in the belief that they are beneficial and harmless, yet they are neither.

Only two months ago OSHA-trained experts came to Vermont to raise awareness of the harms caused by the inappropriate use of masks, and to address the fact that medical settings and schools in the state are still enforcing mask mandates on patients, staff, and children.

Information is power, and our rights are not going to defend themselves. It's time for a second opinion from the real experts in the field, the ones who are transparent about the benefits, limits, and risks associated with their recommendations.

This article was NOT written by an OSHA-trained expert. Please check out these resources to learn more:

- OSHA's publication *A Brief Guide to Mold in the Workplace*: <https://www.osha.gov/publications/shib101003>
- OSHA's standards pertaining to respiratory protection in the workplace: <https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.134>
- CDC's *Mask Guidance* factsheet: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>
- To learn more about the respiratory hazards of masks, and hear the experts who came to Vermont last spring to raise awareness, go to: vtmasksurvey.com

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Amy Hornblas is a licensed health educator who lives in Cabot, Vermont. She received a BA in Community Health from Goddard College in 1994. She has provided health education with people of all ages and abilities on topics such as violence and disease prevention for decades. She is the author of *This Is Your Brain on Television*, a book and curriculum to address the effects of media violence. After 10 years teaching health in the St. Johnsbury School District, she resigned in 2020 instead of making her students and fellow staff wear masks. She has spent the past three years raising public awareness of the hazards of masks, providing free educational materials on her website (vtmasksurvey.com), is author of [The Vermont Mask Survey](#), and organized [The Vermont Emergency Forum to Assess the Respiratory Hazards of Masks](#) in Burlington last spring.