

MAINTAINING BEST PRACTICES AND PROTECTING PPE SUPPLY

Honeywell's continued focus on quality and stability in supply

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A TIME FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Traumatic surges in demand and disruptions in personal protective equipment (PPE) supply in recent years have tested the American supply chain. While healthcare organizations attempt to enforce stronger supply safeguards, regulatory agencies continue to examine PPE practices and requirements to ensure the future safety of the industry's workers and patients. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to reveal our supply vulnerabilities, healthcare stakeholders will focus on close supplier relationships with operations transparency, a high level of quality from PPE manufacturers and supplier commitments to prepare for future crises.

PPE supply issues are the result of a perfect storm that has been brewing for years. In an effort to reduce costs,

healthcare organizations have focused on standardization and sole-sourcing of PPE products such as gloves, gowns and face masks. Awarding contracts to fewer suppliers equated to lower prices and a heavy reliance on overseas manufacturers, most of whom were in China. United States distributors and health networks are now working to improve their precarious position in a country that imports more PPE than any other in the world.¹

The pandemic has revealed the dangers of over-standardization in many PPE product categories. It emphasized the importance of true supply chain transparency and collaboration. And, as new suppliers enter the market, healthcare purchasing departments and providers need reassurance that PPE

products protecting staff and everyone they encounter meet the highest safety and performance standards.

Healthcare organizations require supply partners with PPE products that offer both clinical quality and comfort to workers. Suppliers whose products are incorporated into the formularies of hospitals and other facilities must have the ability to support and sustain a stronger supply chain.



SUPPLY CHAIN STABILITY

PPE availability and supply have improved compared to mid-pandemic levels, but shortages linger. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) confirmed the continuance of shortages in October 2021 for certain surgical respirators; nitrile, vinyl, specialty and latex gloves; surgical gowns and level 2 isolation gowns; and surgical face masks.² Facilities are still vulnerable, as their PPE suppliers create safeguards to weather future storms.

Healthcare purchasing departments face additional challenges once products arrive in the United States. In some estimates, essential products, including some categories of PPE, experience additional average delays of up to 37 days.³ Planning for potential supply shortages and close monitoring of supply, as well as diversification of manufacturer origin, will be important after the past two years of severe supply slowdowns. In times of dire need, distributors and healthcare organizations value consistent delivery of products over every other service factor.

“Splitting routine utilization between multiple suppliers, including some with U.S. or North America-based production is a key strategy to protecting against future shortages,” said Allison Pearsall, Honeywell Senior Product Management Leader, Healthcare PPE. “Healthcare organizations should consider a utilization review to reduce SKUs and inventory while adding suppliers for redundancy and look for supply chain [security and] transparency.”⁴

Healthcare purchasing managers must look beyond their suppliers’ manufacturing locations. They need greater visibility throughout the supply chain journey in order to understand and anticipate bottlenecks. That means gaining a better understanding of who is supplying the suppliers (i.e., raw material providers, converting operations, manufacturing, etc.) and how they may be affected during a crisis. In addition to the country of manufacture, the capacity and ability to ramp up output during a demand surge is a key consideration.

As a first point of reference for medical product and device contracting, group purchasing organizations (GPOs) have recognized the value of relationships with domestic and near-shore manufacturers. Member hospitals and sites for alternate care often depend on product and device vetting by their purchasing organizations and look to GPO contracts and committed supplier relationships and joint ventures when making purchasing decisions. Honeywell’s exam gloves agreement with healthcare solutions provider and GPO, Premier, Inc., provides a pathway to a committed level of supply for facilities nationwide.



NEW BEST PRACTICES

Critical shortages of N95s and other PPE triggered stockpiling and rationing of respirators to healthcare professionals. Early in the pandemic, many healthcare professionals reused respirators day after day. Hospitals were issuing workers one N95 per week in some cases, as COVID-19 cases skyrocketed across America. In one clinician's explanation of overuse, one respirator on a five-day stretch was described as a "sponge for microbes".⁵ Unfortunately, healthcare workers had no choice in the matter due to lack of supply.

It's no wonder that some lingering tendencies to overuse N95s remain. These respirators are now a more precious commodity, as the pandemic takes on new forms, but government agencies have stepped in with upgraded recommendations and requirements for a safer workplace. What are the new best practices for PPE? As the struggle to stabilize various categories of PPE continues, Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) newest proposed guidelines attempt to answer this.

Mid-year 2021, OSHA issued an emergency temporary standard (ETS) focused on healthcare settings. Requirements of the standard include both implementation of extensive written plans of how to mitigate COVID-19 and facility provision of respiratory protection to all workers working indoors or in vehicles. Although these healthcare practices were in place at many facilities, the OSHA guidelines solidify the requirements with specifics and OSHA's ability to cite employers for non-compliance and retaliation against workers who voice concerns.⁶

While the ETS is in effect, OSHA continues to work on addressing the levels of proper use of PPE equipment. Hospitals and the full spectrum of healthcare facilities now have more clear guidance to craft their own infection control protocols, based on the presence of this highly transmissible virus. Those new protocols increase the use of PPE significantly, which helps keep workers and patients safe. But facilities must now look deeply into their practices and decide how to revamp processes—and their budgets—to fully protect their staff.

As OSHA refines its guidelines, other government agencies continue to update recommendations for PPE in order to keep medical staff safe and ensure that healthcare workers discard used and contaminated equipment regularly. CDC guidelines recommend disposing National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH)-approved N95 respirators after every work shift unless they become soiled, damaged or hard to breathe through. CDC also recommends disposal of N95s after any care encounter with a patient with a SARS-CoV-2 infection.⁷

While healthcare facilities closely watch their inventories on essential products, agencies continue to ponder PPE guidance in response to changes in the pandemic. In early January 2022, as the relentless Omicron variant drove cases and hospitalizations upward, the CDC considered a recommendation for broader use of N95s or KN95s, as opposed to using cloth face coverings, by the general public.⁸



"Many PPE products, such as N95 respirators, face masks and face shields, were never originally designed to be used through an entire shift," said Pearsall. "Honeywell is focusing innovation efforts on meeting the more stringent needs of users for this new use case."

PRIORITIZING QUALITY

Without the right protective gear against biological threats, any healthcare workplace could be a dangerous or deadly environment. Healthcare workers are unique in that the hazards of their jobs can follow them home. Safety relies on quality, and there's no room for deficiencies or malfunction with PPE.

A flood of new PPE suppliers entered the marketplace at the onset of the pandemic, and suddenly the risk of receiving counterfeit healthcare goods from non-vetted suppliers was concerning. Dwindling legitimate supply caused many healthcare organizations to bring in products from relatively unknown suppliers or from suppliers that were not fully vetted and unqualified for healthcare.

To help ensure medical devices, including PPE, are safe and effective, the FDA has established Quality Systems Regulations and Good Manufacturing Practices.⁹ Knowing the indicators of counterfeit products can help avoid missteps with illegitimate vendors (see sidebar). Additionally, the CDC provides an easy-access listing of all NIOSH-approved N95 respirators on the market.¹⁰

At Honeywell, we're committed to safety in the healthcare workplace and supporting healthcare networks and facilities in their efforts to protect clinicians, staff and patients while delivering high quality, safe patient care. As we encounter new challenges, quality is paramount. Dedicated clinical and support staff in healthcare need PPE defense they can trust.



SEVEN SIGNS AN N95 RESPIRATOR COULD BE COUNTERFEIT

On March 1, 2021, the AMA reported that more than 10 million counterfeit N95 respirators had been confiscated since the pandemic's onset. Many were in use at some of the country's largest healthcare systems. The news prompted National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to issue a notice about the fake N95s and how physicians and others in healthcare can spot them.

According to NIOSH, here are seven signs of counterfeit respirators that physicians and staffers at medical groups and health systems should look for:

- 1. NO MARKINGS AT ALL ON THE FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATOR.**
- 2. NO APPROVAL NUMBER ON FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATOR OR HEADBAND.**
- 3. NO NIOSH MARKINGS.**
- 4. NIOSH SPELLED INCORRECTLY.**
- 5. PRESENCE OF DECORATIVE FABRIC OR OTHER DECORATIVE ADD-ONS.**
- 6. CLAIMS OF APPROVAL FOR CHILDREN—NIOSH DOES NOT APPROVE RESPIRATORY PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN.**
- 7. FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATOR HAS EAR LOOPS INSTEAD OF HEADBANDS.**

-Source: 7 signs those new N95s at your physician practice might be fake; American Medical Association; March 1, 2021

A TRUSTED EMBEDDED SUPPLIER

As a company committed to security and protection, Honeywell has formed strong industry relationships and trust of workers and their company stakeholders. We saw a breakdown in the safety of workers in healthcare, and we did the thing we know best: we sought to expand our capabilities to help protect them.

Backed by decades of industrial experience, Honeywell's PPE helps protect the lives of 500 million workers every day. Our passion is protecting more workers in more environments with innovative products that meet changing needs, which is evident with our transition into the healthcare space.

"In line with our other head-to-toe PPE industrial solutions, we're dedicated to the safety of healthcare professionals," said Will Lange, Honeywell Chief Commercial Officer, PPE. "We'll continue to work within the industry to introduce and improve our PPE products for these important frontline workers."



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