UCSF N95 Reprocessing Pilot Program

The global COVID-19 pandemic is putting an unprecedented strain on healthcare systems across the globe. Shortages of critical personal protective equipment (PPE), including N95 respirators, mean that we must explore new technologies and techniques to better preserve our resources.

To ensure that the UCSF Health System has sufficient resources to provide the highest standard of Patient care, the PPE Resilience Committee is conducting a 90-Day Pilot program to reprocess N95 masks. The Pilot will run from May 27-August 25, 2020.

Why are we reprocessing a disposable mask?
N95 Respirators are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for health care workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.

Will the reprocessed masks be sterile? How are they processed?
Currently, there is no reprocessing method that can make a sterility claim. However, there is abundant data that suggests the reprocessing methods that have been evaluated to date are effective against the target organism SARS-CoV-2, which is the causative agent of COVID-19.
The methods to be employed at UCSF for this pilot program are:
• Vapor hydrogen peroxide fogging at Parnassus (to be conducted by an off-site provider)
• Onsite reprocessing using ultraviolet germicidal irradiation at Mt Zion

Will the reprocessed N95 masks be distributed?
No. The pilot program is strictly to assess the efficacy of the process in case of a Critical Supply Emergency. Reprocessed masks will be stored and studied to ensure that, should the need arise in the future, safe and effective PPE will be available.

Will I get a mask that was used by someone else? How can I be sure I will get my own mask back?
No. Each mask will be marked, and, using the SPD Tracking System, traced back to the individual user.

Is it safe to reprocess N95 masks?
Yes. The US FDA has recently issued Emergency Use Authorizations (EUA) to sterilization equipment manufacturers (including the two processing methods that will be employed at UCSF) for emergency use of their products in decontaminating compatible N95 respirators. In addition, all masks to be reprocessed will undergo strict quality control inspection; any mask that does not meet our standards will be discarded.

Why can’t we just buy more N95 masks?
The global pandemic is putting a huge strain on healthcare systems and manufacturers across the globe. Even with significant production capacity increases from the largest N95 respirator manufacturers, the supply cannot keep up with demand, so buying more PPE is often not an option.

Is UCSF running out of N95 masks?
No. UCSF secured an adequate supply of N95 masks early in the pandemic. We are in no immediate risk of depleting our supply to an unacceptable level.

The pilot program training will take place May 19-22, with a Go Live scheduled for May 27 – 29
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