

# How to tell if your N95 Respirator is NIOSH Approved

## Defining “NIOSH Approved”

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is the federal agency responsible for testing and approving respirators used in U.S. workplace settings.

A NIOSH-approved N95 is the most common type of filtering facepiece respirator (FFR), which is a type of disposable respirator meant to form a tight seal to the face, removing particles from the air as you breathe through it. This includes all types of particles, such as bacteria, viruses, and dust. When used in an occupational setting, NIOSH-approved respirators, including N95s, are meant to be used as part of a workplace’s respiratory protection program. These programs are [regulated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) (OSHA) and must include specific elements such as medical evaluations, [fit testing](#), and training. If your respirator has been approved by NIOSH, you can be confident that it is working as expected to protect you as long as:

- It is properly maintained
- It fits properly
- It is worn and used correctly
- It is replaced as recommended by the manufacturer

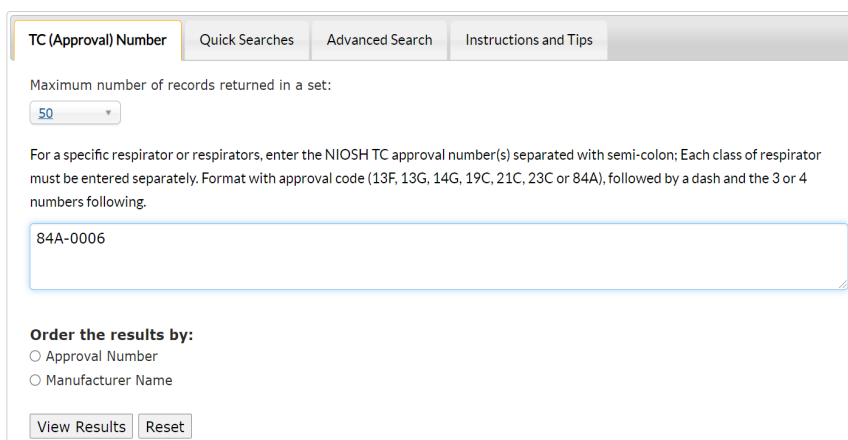
NIOSH only approves respirators that pass its strict [quality assurance and performance requirements](#). As part of these tests, NIOSH uses a near worst-case penetrating aerosol size (i.e., particles that are best able to make it through a filter), and an N95 respirator must not allow more than 5% of these particles to penetrate through. This ensures that every respirator that passes these tests will filter potentially hazardous particles as expected when used in real-world situations.

## How to tell if an N95 is NIOSH Approved

The easiest way to tell if your N95 is NIOSH approved is to search for it on the NIOSH [Certified Equipment List \(CEL\)](#). All NIOSH-approved respirators have a testing and certification (TC) approval number (e.g., TC 84A-XXXX), which must be printed on the respirator. The CEL has an option to search by the TC approval number, which will also help identify any private labels (alternate brand names) associated with that approval number. If you search a NIOSH TC approval number and no results are found within the CEL, that means it is not a valid NIOSH approval number and the product is not NIOSH approved. NIOSH also [provides frequently updated lists of all approved FFRs](#) by type (including N95s) and model/part numbers, which include the manufacturer’s instructions describing how to put the respirator on correctly.



Photo courtesy of Shutterstock



The screenshot shows the NIOSH Certified Equipment List search interface. At the top, there are tabs for "TC (Approval) Number", "Quick Searches", "Advanced Search", and "Instructions and Tips". Below the tabs, there is a dropdown menu for "Maximum number of records returned in a set:" with "50" selected. A text input field contains the search term "84A-0006". Below the input field, there is a section "Order the results by:" with two radio button options: "Approval Number" (selected) and "Manufacturer Name". At the bottom of the search area, there are "View Results" and "Reset" buttons.

Example of using the TC approval number search option on the Certified Equipment List

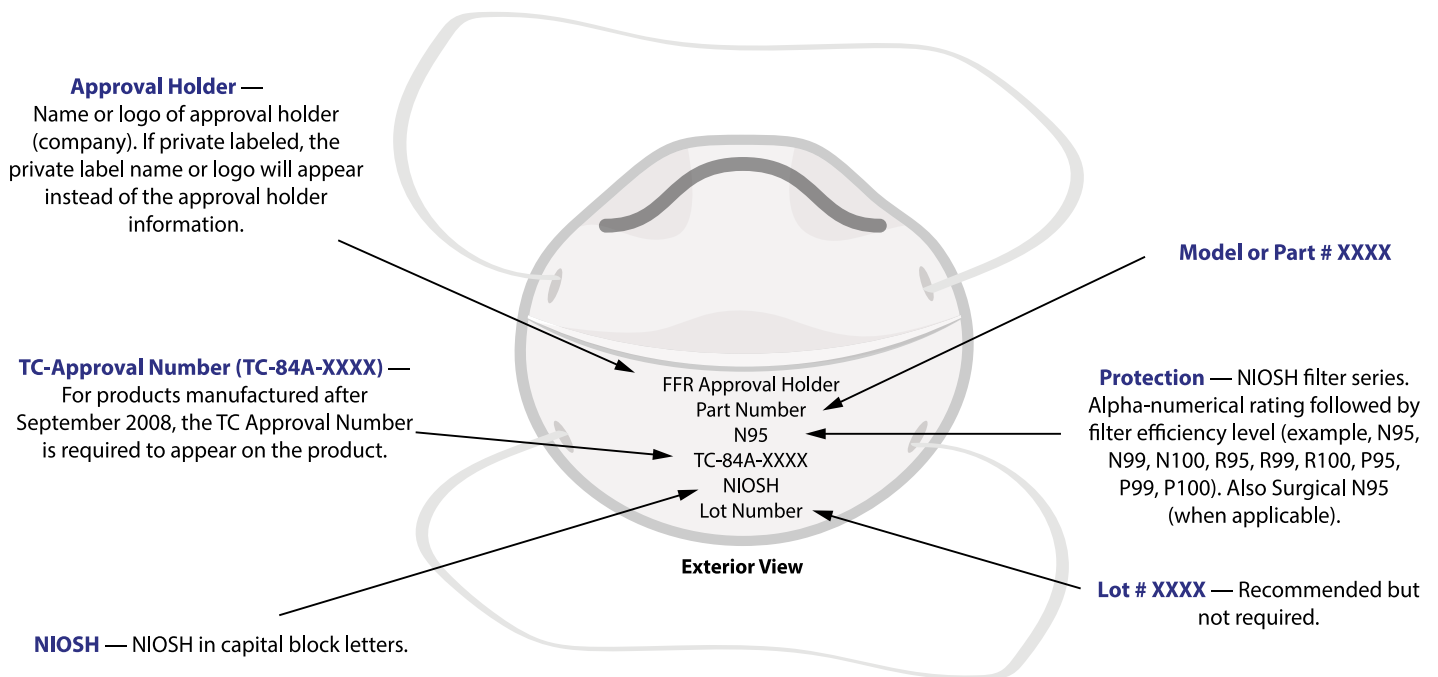


Additionally, respirators that have earned NIOSH approval will have [specific labeling printed on the facepiece](#). You may see some respirators on the market labeled as “N95,” but if a respirator does not contain all of the components of the required label, it is not a NIOSH-approved respirator and, therefore, cannot be relied on to provide the same level of respiratory protection.

### Required information on an N95 abbreviated label (on the FFR itself):



- Name of approval holder/manufacturer business name
- Part number (which may be the model number, but looking for the part number, even on FFRs, is the most accurate way to identify a particular respirator)
- NIOSH filter series and filter efficiency level, which will be N95 (for other FFR types, it could be N99, N100, R95, R99, R100, P95, P99, or P100)
- NIOSH Testing and Certification approval number, e.g., TC-84A-XXXX
- NIOSH in capital block letters
- Lot number may be on the N95 abbreviated label or the product packaging

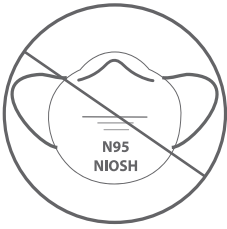


## Counterfeit Respirators/Misrepresentation of Approval

Counterfeit respirators are those that have not undergone NIOSH testing and evaluation themselves, but were specifically manufactured to mimic a respirator product that did receive NIOSH approval. Misrepresentation of the NIOSH approval occurs when a respirator product is falsely marketed and sold as being approved by NIOSH. Because these products are not NIOSH approved, they may not be capable of providing appropriate respiratory protection to workers. NIOSH is aware that when the national demand for N95 respirators is high, the number of falsified claims of NIOSH approval of products on the market also increases. When NIOSH becomes aware of counterfeit respirators that misrepresent NIOSH approval, the product is posted on the [Counterfeit Respirators/Misrepresentation of NIOSH Approval webpage](#) to alert users, purchasers, and manufacturers. This is the best place to check if NIOSH identified the product you are planning to buy as being a counterfeit respirator.

For more information on NIOSH’s policy on fraudulent claims of approval, see the [NIOSH Conformity Assessment Letter to Manufacturers, CA 2020-1032](#).

## Signs that an N95 may be counterfeit:

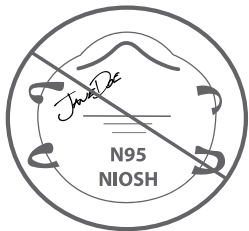


- Does not include **all** the required label markings on the FFR, as described above
- NIOSH is spelled incorrectly
- Has decorative fabric or other decorative add-ons (e.g., sequins)
- Claims to be approved for children (NIOSH does not approve any type of respiratory protection for children)
- The use of ear loops that do not use a fastener to connect them behind the head. A NIOSH-approved respirator would have a much more common set of two head bands (one of which goes over the crown of the head, and the other that sits at the base of the neck) or ear loops that are approved to use with a connecting fastener

## Approved Respirators that have been Altered, Modified, or had the NIOSH Approval Revoked

A NIOSH approval applies only to the respirator as it was tested and approved by NIOSH. Even the slightest modification to an approved respirator, whether altered by the manufacturer or the user, voids the NIOSH approval and could affect its form, fit, or function and the protection it provides.

### Common examples of respirator alterations that void the NIOSH approval:



- A manufacturer or vendor makes a design change without submitting the product to NIOSH for a new approval (e.g., a manufacturer changes the way the straps are attached to the facepiece)
- A third party who is not authorized by NIOSH makes a change to the product or tries to copy an approved product
- Wearers themselves try to alter their respirator to make it more comfortable or improve its appearance. Examples of this include users replacing the straps or using a marker to write (e.g., a name) or draw on the facepiece itself
- Respirators that were previously approved by NIOSH and had the approval revoked or rescinded are repackaged and sold under another brand

When the NIOSH approval has been revoked or rescinded, the approval is removed from the CEL, which means the respirator is no longer NIOSH approved. In such cases, NIOSH issues Respiratory Protective Device Information notices to alert stakeholders and posts them on the NIOSH NPPTL [Conformity Assessment Notices webpage](#). The best way to stay informed about when a respirator's approval has been revoked is to sign up for the [NIOSH NPPTL listserv](#).

For questions about NIOSH-approved respirators or other personal protective equipment, contact [PPEConcerns@cdc.gov](mailto:PPEConcerns@cdc.gov).

### Suggested Citation

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### Get More Information

Find NIOSH products and get answers to workplace safety and health questions:  
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348  
CDC/NIOSH INFO: [cdc.gov/info](https://cdc.gov/info) | [cdc.gov/niosh](https://cdc.gov/niosh)  
Monthly NIOSH eNews: [cdc.gov/niosh/eNews](https://cdc.gov/niosh/eNews)