

# WEARING EYE PROTECTION IN THE WORKPLACE

Goggles, safety glasses, and face shields are tools to slow the spread of COVID-19 and help protect employees.



## Will wearing eye protection prevent the spread of COVID-19 in my workplace?

When an infected person coughs or talks, respiratory droplets containing virus particles can spray from their mouth or nose into another person's face. You're most likely to inhale these droplets through your mouth or nose, but they can also enter through any mucous membrane, including your eyes.

## Should my employees wear eye protection?

Employers should assess the hazards to which their workers may be exposed; evaluate the risk of exposure; and select, implement, and ensure workers use controls to prevent exposure.

The US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is part of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and has provided the following information concerning the use of goggles, face shields, safety glasses, and full face respirators for infection control purposes in their publication [Eye Protection for Infection Control](#).

CDC/NIOSH recommends eye protection to prevent occupational exposure when workers may be at risk of acquiring infectious diseases via ocular (eye) exposure. Eye protection is intended to provide a barrier to infectious materials entering the eye and is often used in conjunction with other personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, gowns, and respirators.

Plexiglass sneeze guards may be used to help reduce the risk of worker exposure to respiratory droplets and surface contamination near workers.

## Do prescription eyeglasses provide adequate protection?

[OSHA](#) states that "when eye protection is needed, use goggles or face shields. Personal eyeglasses are *not* considered adequate eye protection."

## What types of eye protection could be worn?

Selection of appropriate protective eyewear should be made based upon the circumstances of exposure, the activity performed, results of a hazard assessment including regulatory requirements, other PPE used, and personal vision needs. Eye protection must be comfortable, allow for sufficient peripheral vision, and be adjustable to ensure a good fit.

### Goggles

Appropriately fitted, goggles (indirectly-vented or non-vented are preferred for infection control) provide the most reliable eye protection from splashes, sprays, and respiratory droplets. Many styles of goggles fit over prescription glasses with minimal gaps. However, to provide the best protection, goggles must fit snugly, particularly from the corners of the eye across the brow. While highly effective as eye protection, goggles do not provide splash or spray protection to other parts of the face.

## Face Shields

Face shields are commonly used as an infection control alternative to goggles. As opposed to goggles, a face shield can also provide protection to other facial areas.

## Safety Glasses

Safety glasses provide impact protection but do not provide the same level of splash or droplet protection as goggles and generally should not be used for infection control purposes.

## What eye protection is available for prescription lenses users?

Many safety glasses or goggles fit over prescription eyewear and can provide protection without impairing the fit of prescription eyewear. Safety glasses with side protection are available, but do not protect as well as goggles.

Contact lenses, by themselves, offer no infection control protection. However, contact lenses may be worn with any of the recommended eye protection devices. Contact lens users should rigorously adhere to [hand washing guidelines](#) when inserting, adjusting, or removing contact lenses.

## Combination of eye protection and other PPE

Eye protection should be selected in the context of other PPE use requirements. Safety goggles may not fit properly when used with certain half-face respirators, and similarly, face shields may not fit properly over some prescription eyeglasses. Once PPE requirements have been decided by the employer, the selected PPE should be pre-tested to assure suitable fit and protection when used as an ensemble.

## How should potentially contaminated eye protection be removed?

Eye protection should be removed by handling only the portion that secures the device to the head (i.e., plastic

temples, elasticized band, ties), as this is considered relatively “clean.” The front and sides of the device (i.e., goggles, face shield) should not be touched, as these surfaces are most likely to be contaminated. Eye protection should be placed in a designated receptacle for cleaning and disinfection.

## Is it safe for others to reuse eye protection?

The eyewear described above is generally not disposable and must be disinfected before reuse. Where possible, each individual worker should be assigned his/her own eye protection to insure appropriate fit and to minimize the potential of exposing the next wearer.

## How should eye protection be disinfected?

Manufacturers may be consulted for their guidance and experience in disinfecting their respective products. Contaminated eye protection devices should be reprocessed in an area where other soiled equipment is handled. Eye protection should be physically cleaned and disinfected with the designated disinfectant, rinsed, and allowed to air dry. Gloves should be worn when cleaning and disinfecting these devices.



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