

Rural Respiratory Health

Oxygen, just like water, is vital to all life. The human lungs breathe in and out from 15 to 25 times per minute without you thinking about it. It's easy to take your lungs for granted. The lungs take a gas that your body needs to get rid of (carbon dioxide) and exchanges it for a gas that your body needs (oxygen).

Within the rural environment, there are many things that can interfere with the lungs operating properly. Grain dust, molds, pollen, animal dander, soil, fumes, and exhaust can be found in abundance on the farm. Each of these items can lead to serious long-term respiratory problems if not prevented or restricted from entering the lungs.

One of the best ways to prevent lung damage from farm-related dangers is to wear appropriate devices that purify existing air and filter out tiny particles in the air. These devices fit over the nose and mouth and use a filter or cartridge to mechanically remove particles when the wearer breathes. There are many styles of respiratory masks on the market. It is important to select the appropriate mask for the job. Check the mask container to determine which mask is suggested for each job.

Consider the following when choosing an appropriate respiratory mask.

- Choose a tested respirator. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) approved masks will be marked.
- Use the correct type of mask for the job. Each mask will be labeled for its proper use. Dust masks won't filter out chemicals and chemical masks won't filter out mold.
- Choose a proper rating for the job being performed. Use a rating of 10 or above.
- Make sure the size and fit are appropriate. Many times this is difficult with children or small people like women. Consider eyeglasses and facial hair when determining proper fit. Masks must have 2 straps to ensure proper seal.

Respirators cannot solve all air quality problems. Wearing the proper mask correctly is vital to help protect lungs from damaging elements. Don't allow masks to give you a false sense of security. Certain farm environments such as manure pits, silos, and sludge tanks could be fatal even while wearing masks.

When determining if and when youth should be wearing respiratory masks on the farm first consider:

- Does the youth have the age and ability to safely perform the farm task?
- Is the youth's face large enough to wear a respiratory mask that fits snugly?
- Is the youth responsible enough to wear the respiratory mask EVERY time he/she performs the job?

Prevent short and long term health risks by wearing appropriate respiratory masks while working on the farm.



Farm Safety



Just Kids