



Designation: F2101 – 23

Standard Test Method for Evaluating the Bacterial Filtration Efficiency (BFE) of Medical Face Mask Materials, Using a Biological Aerosol of *Staphylococcus aureus*¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation F2101; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ε) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

INTRODUCTION

Workers, primarily those in the healthcare profession involved in treating and caring for individuals injured or sick, as well as the patient, can be exposed to biological aerosols capable of transmitting disease. These diseases, which may be caused by a variety of microorganisms, can pose significant risks to life and health. Since engineering controls cannot eliminate all possible exposures, attention is placed on reducing the potential of airborne exposure through the use of medical face masks.

1. Scope

1.1 This test method is used to measure the bacterial filtration efficiency (BFE) of medical face mask materials, employing a ratio of the upstream bacterial challenge to downstream residual concentration to determine filtration efficiency of medical face mask materials.

1.2 This test method is a quantitative method that allows filtration efficiency for medical face mask materials to be determined. The maximum filtration efficiency that can be determined by this method is 99.9 %.

1.3 This test method does not apply to all forms or conditions of biological aerosol exposure. Users of the test method should review modes for worker exposure and assess the appropriateness of the method for their specific applications.

1.4 This test method evaluates medical face mask materials as an item of protective clothing but does not evaluate materials for regulatory approval as respirators. If respiratory protection for the wearer is needed, a NIOSH-certified respirator should be used. Relatively high bacterial filtration efficiency measurements for a particular medical face mask material do not ensure that the wearer will be protected from biological aerosols, since this test method primarily evaluates the performance of the composite materials used in the construction of the medical face mask and not its design, fit, or facial-sealing properties.

1.5 *Units*—The values stated in SI units or inch-pound units are to be regarded separately as standard. The values stated in each system may not be exact equivalents; therefore, each system shall be used independently of the other. Combining values from the two systems may result in nonconformance of the standard.

1.6 This test method does not address breathability of the medical face mask materials or any other properties affecting the ease of breathing through the medical face mask material.

1.7 This test method may also be used to measure the bacterial filtration efficiency (BFE) of other porous medical products such as surgical gowns, surgical drapes, and sterile barrier systems.

1.8 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

1.9 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F23 on Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F23.40 on Biological.

Current edition approved March 1, 2023. Published March 2023. Originally approved in 2001. Last previous edition approved in 2022 as F2101 – 22. DOI: 10.1520/F2101-23.

² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

E171/E171M Practice for Conditioning and Testing Flexible Barrier Packaging
E177 Practice for Use of the Terms Precision and Bias in ASTM Test Methods
E691 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Study to Determine the Precision of a Test Method
F1494 Terminology Relating to Protective Clothing
 2.2 *ANSI/ASQ Standard*.³
ANSI/ASQ Z1.4 Sampling Procedures and Tables for Inspection by Attributes
 2.3 *ISO Standard*.⁴
ISO 2859-1 Sampling Plans for Inspection by Attributes
 2.4 *Military Standard*.⁵
MIL-STD 36954C (1973) Military Specification: Mask, Surgical, Disposable

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 *aerosol, n*—a suspension of solid or liquid particles in a gas.

3.1.2 *agar, n*—a semi-solid culture medium used to support the growth of bacteria and other microorganisms.

3.1.3 *airborne exposure pathways, n*—inhalation routes of exposure to the medical face mask wearer.

3.1.4 *bacterial filtration efficiency (BFE), n*—the effectiveness of a medical face mask material in preventing the passage of aerosolized bacteria, expressed in the percentage of a known quantity that does not pass the medical face mask material at a given aerosol flow rate.

3.1.5 *biological aerosol, n*—a suspension of particles containing biological agents which have been dispersed in a gas.

3.1.6 *blood-borne pathogen, n*—an infectious bacterium or virus, or other disease-inducing microbe carried in blood or other potentially infectious body fluids.

3.1.7 *body fluid, n*—any liquid produced, secreted, or excreted by the human body.

3.1.8 *medical face mask, n*—an item of protective clothing designed to protect portions of the wearer's face, including the mucous membrane areas of the wearer's nose and mouth, from contact with blood and other body fluids during medical procedures.

3.1.8.1 *Discussion*—Medical face masks also function to partly limit the spread of biological contamination from the mask wearer (health care provider) to the patient.

3.1.9 *protective clothing, n*—an item of clothing that is specifically designed and constructed for the intended purpose of isolating all or part of the body from a potential hazard; or, isolating the external environment from contamination by the wearer of the clothing.

3.2 For definitions of other protective clothing-related terms used in this test method, refer to Terminology **F1494**.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 The medical face mask material is clamped between a six-stage cascade impactor and an aerosol chamber. The bacterial aerosol is introduced into the aerosol chamber using a nebulizer and a culture suspension of *Staphylococcus aureus*. The aerosol is drawn through the medical face mask material using a vacuum attached to the cascade impactor. The six-stage cascade impactor uses six agar plates to collect aerosol droplets which penetrate the medical face mask material. Control samples are collected with no test specimen clamped in the test apparatus to determine the upstream aerosol counts.

4.2 The agar plates from the cascade impactor are incubated for 48 h and counted to determine the number of viable particles collected. The ratio of the upstream counts to the downstream counts collected for the test specimen are calculated and reported as a percent bacterial filtration efficiency.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 This test method offers a procedure for evaluation of medical face mask materials for bacterial filtration efficiency. This test method does not define acceptable levels of bacterial filtration efficiency. Therefore, when using this test method it is necessary to describe the specific condition under which testing is conducted.

5.2 This test method has been specifically designed for measuring bacterial filtration efficiency of medical face masks, using *Staphylococcus aureus* as the challenge organism. The use of *S. aureus* is based on its clinical relevance as a leading cause of nosocomial infections.

5.3 This test method has been designed to introduce a bacterial aerosol challenge to the test specimens at a flow rate of 28.3 L/min (1 ft³/min). This flow rate is within the range of normal respiration and within the limitations of the cascade impactor.

5.4 Unless otherwise specified, the testing shall be performed with the inside of the medical face mask in contact with the bacterial challenge. Testing may be performed with the aerosol challenge directed through either the face side or liner side of the test specimen, thereby allowing evaluation of filtration efficiencies which relate to both patient-generated aerosols and wearer-generated aerosols.

5.5 Degradation by physical, chemical, and thermal stresses could negatively impact the performance of the medical face mask material. The integrity of the material can also be compromised during use by such effects as flexing and abrasion, or by wetting with contaminants such as alcohol and perspiration. Testing without these stresses could lead to a false sense of security. If these conditions are of concern, evaluate the performance of the medical face mask material for bacterial filtration efficiency following an appropriate pretreatment technique representative of the expected conditions of use. Consider preconditioning to assess the impact of storage conditions and shelf life for disposable products, and the effects of laundering and sterilization for reusable products.

³ Available from American Society for Quality (ASQ), 600 N. Plankinton Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53203, <http://www.asq.org>.

⁴ Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

⁵ Available from Standardization Documents Order Desk, Bldg. 4 Section D, 700 Robbins Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19111-5094, Attn: NPODS.