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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. All of these 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 a mask. Masks are available for various things and use a filter or cartridge to mechanically remove particles. It is important to select the appropriate mask for the job. Check the mask packaging to determine which mask is suggested for each job. Wearing the proper mask correctly is vital to help protect lungs from damaging elements.

Consider the following when choosing an appropriate respiratory mask:

▸ Choose a tested respirator (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health approved masks will be marked)
▸ Use the correct type of mask for the job
▸ Use a mask with a rating of 95 or above
▸ Make sure the size and fit are appropriate, which can be difficult for children
▸ Consider eye glasses and facial hair when determining proper fit

Just don't allow a mask to give you a false sense of security. Certain farm environments like 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:

▸ Are they old enough and have the ability to do the job?
▸ Do you have a mask that will fit them correctly?
▸ Are they responsible enough to wear the mask throughout the duration of the job?

Don't let a respiratory mask give you a false sense of security. They don't work in some situations.