

**Facial Coverings and Personal Protective Equipment
FAQS
4th June 2020 UPDATE**

What is the difference between facial Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and facial coverings?

PPE is protective equipment which protects users against health and safety risks. Facial PPE can be face masks, eye protection and safety helmets.

Facial coverings are non-surgical (or other medical grade) masks for facial covering of the mouth and nose, that is made of cloth or other textiles, and through which individuals can breathe e.g. a scarf.

More information can be found in the government's guidance [How to wear and make a cloth face covering](#). There are a number of suppliers offering facial coverings. The [BSI guide to masks and face coverings for use in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic](#) is a good source document for understanding the different types available and the relevant standards which ensures compliance with the appropriate standards and regulations.

When undertaking professional activities, such as face to face data collection, should practitioners wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

Certain work environments and procedures convey a higher risk of transmission of Covid-19. Where practitioners already used PPE in their work activity before Covid-19, they should continue to do so e.g. in undertaking and handling product testing of food.

The current government advice is that additional PPE beyond what you would usually wear for work is "not beneficial". Covid-19 is a different type of risk to the risks individuals face in a work place and needs to be managed through social distancing, hygiene and fixed teams, not through the use of PPE. The exception is clinical settings such as hospitals. Supplies of PPE needs to be reserved for those who need the equipment to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers.

*If you need to use PPE it should be purchased for an approved PPE suppliers, a list is available via the Registered Safety Supplier Scheme list:
<https://www.registeredsafetysupplierscheme.co.uk/supplier-list/>*

When undertaking professional activities, such as face to face data collection, should practitioners wear facial coverings and/or gloves?

There may be some circumstances when wearing a face covering and/or gloves may be beneficial as a precautionary measure. Current evidence suggests, for example that whilst wearing a face covering does not protect wearers, it may protect others if the wearer is infected but has not developed Covid-19 symptoms.

Where there are requirements to wear facial coverings in specific workplaces and/or environments, such as on public transport in England, then practitioners must ensure that they follow these requirements.

If facial coverings are used it is important to use face coverings properly and wash your hands before putting them on, after taking them and if you have touched or moved them whilst wearing them. More information can be found in the government's guidance [How to wear and make a cloth face covering](#).

What is a facial covering and where can I obtain supplies of them?

Facial coverings are non-surgical (or other medical grade) masks for facial covering of the mouth and nose, that is made of cloth or other textiles, and through which individuals can breathe e.g. a scarf.

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Should practitioners use facial coverings when undertaking research with participants who are hearing impaired?

Wearing a facial covering may make communication more challenging e.g. the extra mental exertion required by participants to listen particularly when there is background noise. Some of challenges can be overcome when facial coverings are made from transparent materials that allow the mouth to be seen but these kinds of covering are not widely available.

The UK's Equalities Act requires reasonable adjustments to be made to support disabled people, including proofing information in an accessible format.

The charity [Action on Hearing Loss](#) has produced some general guidance on communication with individuals suffering hearing lost:

Where lip reading is possible:

- *Make sure there is adequate lighting*
- *Face the patient*
- *Get the patients attention before speaking*
- *Use normal lip movements, facial expression and gestures*

The below are particularly important when participants cannot use visual cues, such as when wearing facial covering:

- *Speak clearly – avoid shouting or speaking unnecessarily slowly*
- *Say things differently if people ask you to repeat or do not understand what you have said*
- *Check understanding by asking the patient to repeat information back*
- *Use plain language and be straight to the point*
- *Reduce background noise as much as possible*
- *Where possible, also provide written information*
- *If requested, speak to a relative or friend*