

**Personal Protective
Equipment (PPE):
Headwear Literature
Review
Executive Summary**

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Executive Summary

This literature review informs the 'Personal Protective Equipment – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Headwear content in the National Infection Prevention and Control Manual (NIPCM).

- [NIPCM section 1.4 'Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)' in Chapter 1.](#)

There are three documents to note:

- The Literature review which provides a comprehensive systematic review of the evidence
- Considered judgement forms which outline the evidence base and expert opinion used to develop the recommendations and good practice points for each literature review research question. Also detailed are the benefits, potential harms, feasibility of implementation, value judgements, intentional vagueness, and exceptions associated with the recommendations and good practice points.
- Evidence tables which detail all the included studies and provide an assessment of the evidence for each research question of the literature review.

Scope

Research questions

There are ten research questions (RQ) in this literature review.

- RQ1 What type(s) of headwear are available for use in health and care settings?
- RQ2 Are there any standards or legislative requirements for the use of headwear in health and care settings?
- RQ3 When should headwear be worn for infection control purposes in health and care settings?
- RQ4 What type(s) of headwear should be used in health and care settings?

- RQ5 What considerations should be given in the situation where headwear is worn for religious and/or cultural purposes?
- RQ6 When should headwear be doffed (taken off) or changed?
- RQ7 Where and how should headwear be donned (put on)?
- RQ8 Where and how should headwear be doffed (taken off)?
- RQ9 How should headwear be disposed?
- RQ10 How should headwear be stored?

Change to Practice

There is no significant change to practice expected as a result of this literature review update. It is understood that recommendations (R) and good practice points (GPP) developed are reflective of current practice.

Change to Recommendations and Good Practice Points

- Two new research questions were added
 - “What type(s) of headwear are available for use in health and care settings?”
 - “Where and how should headwear be donned (put on)?”
- Question “Why should headwear be worn for infection control purposes?” was removed.

The following questions were modified from the previous review.

- Are there any legislative or standards requirements for the use of headwear as PPE for infection control purposes? (modification: added the phrase “or standards”)
- When should headwear be worn for infection control purposes in health and care settings? (modification: previously “When/where should headwear be worn?”)
- What type(s) of headwear should be used in health and care settings? (modification: phrase “in health and care settings” added)

- What considerations should be given in the situation where headwear is worn for religious and/or cultural purposes? (modifications: previously, “What considerations should be made regarding religious and/or cultural head/face wear?”)
- When should headwear be doffed (taken off) or changed? (modification: terms “doffed/taken off” added)

Summary of Recommendations (R) and Good Practice Points (GPP)

Research Question 1: What type(s) of headwear are available for use in health and care settings?

- **The question does not necessitate the development of a recommendation or good practice point but rather a description of the types of headwear available for use.**
- **The available evidence identifies several types of headwear for use in health and care settings including:**
 - **Bouffant caps: provide complete coverage of head, facial hair, ears, and nape of neck.**
 - **Skull caps/Surgeon/theatre caps: provide limited coverage of the top of head and crown, leaving ears and nape exposed.**
 - **Hood-style coverings: provide complete coverage of head and facial hair.**
 - **Cloth caps/hats: require regular laundering.**
 - **Both disposable (single-use) and reusable options are available across headwear types**

Research Question 2: Are there any standards or legislative requirements for the use of headwear in health and care settings?

R2.1 Although no legislation explicitly mandates headwear use for infection prevention and control, health and care organisations must comply with broader PPE and workplace safety laws, including:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974)
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations (2002, as amended)
- The Personal Protective Equipment at Work (Amendment) Regulations (2022)
- The UK PPE (Enforcement) Regulations (2018) and Regulation (EU) 2016/425

R2.2 Any headwear classified as PPE must comply with relevant CE or UKCA product marking requirements.

GPP2.1 Where there is a need for headwear to be procured specifically for use as PPE for Infection Prevention Control (IPC) purposes in Scottish health and care settings, it should be ensured that the items comply with the ergonomic principles outlined in BS EN 13921:2007, ensuring that they are:

- Comfortable and practical for extended wear
- Compatible with other PPE items such as masks and eyewear
- Non-restrictive to staff movement or visibility

Research Question 3: When should headwear be worn for infection control purposes in health and care settings?

GPP3.1 Headwear should be worn in surgical environments such as theatres, or other high-risk procedural settings where there is a

requirement to protect patients from contamination and minimise risk of contamination of the theatre environment or sterile field.

GPP3.2 Headwear should be worn as PPE during procedures where splashing/spraying of bloody and body fluids is anticipated.

Research Question 4: What type(s) of headwear should be used in health and care settings?

GPP4.1 Selection of headwear type should be based on its ability to contain all of the wearer's hair.

GPP4.2 Both disposable single-use and reusable (launderable) headwear are permissible options. The choice between them should be informed by a local risk-assessment that balances infection control principles, material integrity, and environmental sustainability.

Research Question 5: What considerations should be given in the situation where headwear is worn for religious and/or cultural purposes?

GPP 5.1 Head coverings worn for religious or cultural reasons should not compromise patient safety by impeding the delivery of patient care or compromise source control. Such coverings must be clean, made of suitable low-linting material, risk assessed locally, and changed in accordance with the local uniform policy.

Research Question 6: When should headwear be doffed (taken off) or changed?

GPP 6.1 Headwear should be removed or changed:

- prior to leaving the dedicated clinical area (i.e. the theatre setting).

- at the end of a single clinical procedure or task.
- immediately or as soon as possible if visibly soiled/contaminated with blood or body fluids, wet, damaged or compromised.
- when used sessionally, should be changed either at the end of a single clinical procedure or task, or at the end of a theatre session.
- in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.

Research Question 7: Where and how should headwear be donned (put on)?

GPP7.1 Headwear should be donned before entering semi restricted or restricted areas, such as the surgical suite, or immediately before the procedure or activity at the point of donning other PPE.

GPP7.2 Headwear should be donned before putting on scrub or sterile attire to prevent contamination of sterile clothing with hair or dandruff.

Research Question 8: Where and how should headwear be doffed (taken off)?

GPP8.1 Headwear should be removed before leaving semi-restricted or restricted areas of the healthcare facility to prevent contamination of other environments (see GPP6.1).

GPP8.2 Headwear should be removed in a manner that minimises contamination to the wearer and environment, avoiding contact between the outer surface of the headwear and hair, skin, or clothing.

Research Question 9: How should headwear be disposed?

GPP9.1 Disposable headwear should be discarded immediately after use in an appropriate clinical waste receptacle.

GPP9.2 Reusable headwear that is visibly soiled and/or contaminated with blood or body fluids should be processed through a healthcare accredited laundry facility.

Research Question 10: How should headwear be stored?

R10.1 Headwear should be stored away from direct sunlight, heat sources and liquids, including chemicals, in an area that is clean and protects it from contamination.