

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is clothing or equipment designed to be worn by someone to protect them from the risk of injury or illness.

PPE can include:

- hearing protective devices, such as ear muffs and ear plugs
- [respiratory protective equipment](#)
- eye and face protection, such as safety glasses and face shields
- safety helmets
- fall arrest harnesses for [working at heights](#)
- skin protection, such as gloves, gauntlets and sunscreen
- clothing, such as high visibility vests, life jackets and coveralls
- footwear, such as safety boots and rubber boots.

Where does the use of PPE fit in the risk management process?

The use of personal protective equipment is lowest on the list of control priorities. These controls should not be relied on as the primary means of risk control until the options higher in the list of control priorities have been exhausted.

Therefore, PPE should only be used:

- as a last resort, where there are no other practical control measures available
- to be a short-term measure until a more effective way of controlling the risk can be used
- together with other controls measures such as [local exhaust ventilation](#)
- by itself during maintenance activities.

There may be specific PPE requirements for working with harmful substances or in certain work activities. Read more about PPE for working with:

- [asbestos](#)
- [engineered or natural stone containing crystalline silica in the stone benchtop industry](#) (PDF, 0.91 MB).

Learn more about [work-related hazards](#).

Who pays?

If PPE is required, the person conducting the business or undertaking must provide it to workers free of charge.

However there may be circumstances where the payment for it can be negotiated.

In deciding who should provide PPE consider:

- the availability of equipment
- whether the equipment can generally be used outside work, such as sunglasses or boots
- the need for a personal fit
- the requirements in the relevant industrial award or enterprise agreement regarding provision of PPE.

Selection

When choosing PPE consider these factors:

Worker

- Check the PPE is a suitable size and fit for each worker. [Respiratory protective equipment](#), for example, requires a good facial seal.
- If PPE is comfortable to wear and workers are involved in choosing it, they will be more likely to use it.
- Individual circumstances of workers may affect choice. For example wearing of prescription glasses, allergies such as latex allergy and some medical conditions.
- Consider workers' medical conditions, which can influence whether they can use certain items of equipment.

Work task

- Match the PPE to the hazard, remembering that a work task may expose workers to more than one hazard. For example welders may need protection from harmful welding gases and fumes, as well as ultraviolet radiation, hot metal and sparks.
- How the work is carried out and the level of risk to the worker. For example a more protective respirator may need to worn where the level of air contamination is very high.
- How long PPE will need to be worn.
- Work demands of the work activity. For example the level of physical activity or dexterity required.
- Make sure PPE that is to be worn at the same time can be used together.

Work environment

- Understand the impacts of a hot and humid work environment.

If you are protecting against exposure to a substance such as a hazardous chemical or a biological substance, consider how the substance can enter the body. For example where a chemical can be absorbed through the lungs and skin, skin protection as well as respiratory protection may be required.

Choose PPE that meets current Australian Standards.

Do not reuse single use PPE for example, disposable gloves.

Maintenance

Proper care and maintenance is essential to ensure PPE continues to provide the necessary level of protection.

- Look for broken or damaged components before using PPE and repair or replace it as needed.
- Replace PPE that has expired or reached its usable lifespan.
- Clean reusable PPE after use and store in a clean area such as a cupboard, drawer or resealable container.
- Report broken, damaged or contaminated PPE.

Sharing PPE

Most PPE is provided for the personal use of a worker. However, PPE may be shared in some circumstances, for example where PPE is only required for limited periods.

Shared PPE must be properly cleaned and disinfected before it is used again to ensure there are no health risks to the next person. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions for appropriate methods.

Information, training and instruction

Workers must be provided with enough information, training and instruction on when to use PPE and how to:

- use, fit and wear it including any adjustments that may be needed
- carry out repair or replace parts
- clean and store it correctly.

When wearing more than one item of PPE to protect against substances, such as hazardous chemicals or

biological substances, it is important to put on and remove each item correctly. If hands could become contaminated when removing PPE, it is important to wash them thoroughly to prevent accidental contamination.

[Watch this film](#) about how to put on and take off PPE.

Related links

- [Personal protective equipment at work \(HSE\)](#)
- [Respiratory protective equipment](#)

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