



# Do You Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) At Work?

10 Things You Need to Know

# Personal Protective Equipment At Work

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is issued to workers to help protect them from harm in the workplace when all other means of minimising risks have already been put in place.**

This guide gives answers to some frequently asked questions on the use of PPE.

## What Is PPE?

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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is equipment or clothing designed to protect individual workers from health or safety hazards at work.

It includes things like:

- Safety helmets.
- Safety glasses or goggles.
- Hi-visibility clothing.
- Weather-proof clothing.
- Thermal clothing for work in cold stores.
- Gloves.
- Safety shoes.



Ordinary work-clothing or uniforms provided solely to present a corporate image do not count as PPE.

Protection provided solely for food hygiene does not count as PPE.

## What Does the Law Say About PPE?

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The main law is the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (some PPE is covered by other laws – eg hearing protection is covered by the Noise at Work Regulations).

The basic legal duty is that employers must provide suitable PPE to protect workers against risks which cannot be controlled by other means. PPE is the last resort. The law makes it clear that it is better to control hazards at source and prevent risks by other means where possible.

- PPE only protects the wearer but control at source protects all workers.
- PPE only helps if workers can and do use it.
- PPE can be costly as it has to be maintained, cleaned and replaced when damaged.

## Do I Have to Wear PPE?

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The regulations say employers must take all reasonable steps to make sure that PPE is properly used and every employee must use any PPE the employer provides.

## How Do I Know When to Wear PPE?

Your employer must provide information and training on use of PPE. This is very important for things like face masks or ear plugs where correct fitting of equipment is essential for protection. But even for basic PPE, the employer should make it clear when it has to be used and why.

## What if I Don't Get the PPE I Need?

If a risk assessment says that PPE is needed, it has to be provided. If your employer will not give you suitable PPE, or will not replace worn or damaged PPE, you would be entitled to refuse to carry out the work that requires you to use PPE.

## What if the PPE Provided Doesn't Fit?

The law says PPE must be suitable. That means it must provide the necessary protection. But it also means it must fit the person wearing it. A range of different sizes and types of PPE will normally be needed to fit different workers.

If there are workers with specific needs – eg non-standard shoe size for safety shoes or health problems which prevent use of standard PPE, then the employer must provide PPE suitable for that individual.

Employers must choose products which are UKCA marked (or CE marked in specific circumstances). PPE should also have a Declaration of Conformity and instructions on how to use the item.

Suppliers can advise them and should provide information on its suitability and on the range of sizes available. They should also be able to help if standard PPE needs to be customised to fit an individual worker with special needs.

## Do I Have to Share PPE with Other Workers?

PPE must be readily available and must be used at all times when the risk assessment requires, so it is normally provided on a personal basis.

Sharing may be acceptable for occasional use for short periods.

For example, if workers need to occasionally work in a yard where hi-vis jackets are needed, a supply of shared jackets by the door may be acceptable. Where PPE is shared it must still fit the workers who use it and employers must make sure it is cleaned and, where necessary, decontaminated between users.

## What if my PPE Gets Damaged or Goes Missing?

Workers are expected to take reasonable care of PPE. There should be a system to report when it gets damaged or lost and needs replacing. Employers should also provide suitable accommodation for PPE so it can be stored safely when not in use.

## Can my Employer Charge Me for the PPE Provided?

No. Under Section 9 of the Health and Safety at Work Act, no charge can be made for PPE provided solely for use at work.

This applies to all charges including returnable deposits. If a worker leaves employment and takes PPE with them without permission, it may be possible for the employer to deduct the replacement cost from wages owing, provided this is clearly stated in the employment contract.

Agency workers must also be provided with PPE free of charge.

The hiring employer and the agency may need to sort out between them which one will pay for the PPE but neither the hiring employer nor the employment agency can charge the individual agency worker for PPE provided.

## What if I Have Problems Regarding PPE?

If you have a problem with the issue, use, suitability or provision of PPE raise it with your manager. If the problem persists, contact your Usdaw rep at work or your Area Organiser at the local Usdaw office.

For a copy of the PPE Regulations and guidance go to:  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l25.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l25.pdf)

## Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively you can phone our Freephone Helpline **0800 030 80 30** to connect you to your regional office or visit our website: [www.usdaw.org.uk](http://www.usdaw.org.uk) You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write **FREEPOST USDAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

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