Australian Government

Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Buyers Guide | COVID-19

Who is this guide for?

Personal protective equipment (PPE) refers to clothing and equipment used to protect the wearer from injury and infection. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some organisations might need to buy PPE for the first time or buy PPE from new suppliers. This guide is intended to help buyers of PPE be more confident in their purchasing decisions, by providing information on PPE and factors to be aware of when buying PPE. This guide is not intended to replace information from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), Safe Work Australia or other health authorities. This guide does not contain exhaustive information on PPE certifications and standards, and does not constitute legal or other professional advice. Readers should seek out further and specific advice to inform their purchasing decisions and use of PPE.

What should I look for when buying PPE?

- Be aware of what standards are applicable to the products you are purchasing and ask your supplier for evidence that their products meet these standards.
- A list of PPE standards is available on the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources website. This list is intended for information purposes only, and readers are encouraged to seek out further information on standards that are specific to their needs.
- If the product is defined by the TGA as a medical device it needs to be included on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG).
- If you are seeking to purchase items from overseas, check that the product being sold is subject to the same level of quality control and assurance as would be expected from an Australian product.
- Check that you are purchasing from a legitimate supplier and be wary of fraudulent offers.
- Take note of the user guidance for products – you may need updated training and operating procedures before using.
- Keep records of PPE – delivery, specifications, user instructions.

How is PPE regulated and certified?

PPE that is designed to, or claims to limit the transmission of diseases like COVID-19 between persons is regulated by the TGA. The TGA is responsible for regulating therapeutic goods in Australia to ensure they are safe and effective. PPE that is *not* intended to prevent the transmission of disease between persons is not regulated by the TGA.

PPE that is regulated by the TGA must be included on the ARTG before it can be lawfully supplied in Australia. The ARTG contains information on products and their sponsor (the person or company who imports, exports or supplies the product) and manufacturer details. Products included on the ARTG will have a unique ARTG identification number (e.g. *ARTG ID: 12345*). You can search for products included on the ARTG on the TGA website.

The TGA requires that manufacturers of PPE have evidence to show their products meet suitable safety standards.

Keeping your workplace safe

Employers and employees must meet their work health and safety (WHS) duties in relation to COVID-19. PPE supplements other control measures, such as physical distancing, good hygiene measures and environmental cleaning. If PPE is used, training must be provided to ensure that workers correctly use and maintain the PPE. Further general and industry-specific advice, guidance and resources on how to keep your workplace safe can be found on Safe Work Australia's website.

Consumer Rights

Under the Australian Consumer Law, businesses must not engage in conduct that is misleading or deceptive, or make false or misleading representations. If you are concerned that a product you have purchased is faulty, does not meet standards, or does not perform in accordance with the supplier/manufacturers claims you should firstly raise your concerns with the seller directly. You can also contact the TGA and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

If a therapeutic good you have purchased is faulty and included in the ARTG, please report this to the TGA using their on-line reporting portal. For more information on COVID-19 for consumers please refer to the ACCC website.

PPE purchasing portals

National, state and territory portals have been established to help connect buyers and sellers of PPE. While these may assist you in finding new suppliers, it is important to conduct your own due diligence when deciding to purchase PPE. Inclusion on one of the registers below does not mean a business has been vetted or endorsed in any way.

- The COVID-19 Manufacturer Response Register - Developed by the Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre, the register is a free, interactive, self-managed platform to support Australian manufacturers, suppliers and purchasers of critical medical and protective products connect with each other.

- ICN Connect – Developed by the Industry Capability Network, ICN Connect is an online portal designed to make it easier for buyers looking for products and services to find what they need. Buyers and sellers can create a listing on the portal to highlight their PPE needs and offers and connect via the platform.

- Victoria – Business Victoria operates a COVID-19 Medical Equipment and PPE Supplier Directory.

- New South Wales – buy.nsw, operated by the NSW Government, has a list of PPE suppliers available to download.

- Queensland – The Department of Regional Development and Manufacturing operates a Manufacturer's Supply Matching Service to assist manufacturers and businesses who are finding it difficult to obtain essential goods. Business Queensland also has advice for suppliers of PPE.

- Western Australia – The Western Australian Department of Health has advice on how to access PPE for different sectors.

- Tasmania – The Tasmanian Department of State Growth operates the Personal Protective Equipment temporary supply register.

Protecting yourself from misleading conduct and scams

Many new suppliers and manufacturers of PPE have entered the market since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While most of these are legitimate businesses, there have been instances of fraud, misleading or deceptive claims being made about the efficacy of products, and poor quality products being sold. It is important to be aware of scams and misleading conduct in order to protect yourself when purchasing PPE.

- Seek out suppliers that are known and trusted legitimate businesses that can validate the standard of the PPE you seek to purchase.

- When purchasing from an online store, look for a URL which starts with "https" and a closed padlock symbol to show that information transmitted on that site is secured.

- Avoid up-front payments and payments via money order, wire transfer, international funds transfer, pre-loaded card or electronic currency like Bitcoin.

- Carefully check correspondence from regular suppliers, as scammers may pretend to be a business you usually deal with. Verify any requests to change the bank details of your supplier and any changes to payment arrangements by calling them on a known and trusted number.

- If you are unsure what you should be paying for PPE, seek quotes from multiple suppliers to help you determine what a reasonable price is.

- If a deal is too good to be true, it could be a scam. Be particularly cautious when dealing with unsolicited contact. Consider establishing protocols to ensure purchasing decisions are approved by more than one person.

- Keep records of PPE delivery, specifications and user instructions.

The Scamwatch website, run by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), has information on COVID-19 scams and tips to protect yourself from fraud.

You can find further information about false or misleading claims on the ACCC website. You can also contact the ACCC with consumer and small business questions or concerns relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Useful links

- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
- Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare
- Australian Government Department of Health: Masks
- Australian Government Department of Health: How to Make a Cloth Mask
- Australian Government Department of Health: Guidance on use of PPE in non-inpatient healthcare settings, during the COVID-19 outbreak
- The Therapeutic Goods Administration
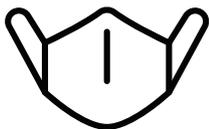- Standards Australia
- Scamwatch
- Safe Work Australia

Comprehensive guidelines on when, where and how to use PPE for the health workforce can be found on the Australian Government Department of Health website. The table below shows common types of PPE and when they are most often used.

FACE PROTECTION

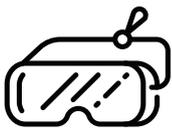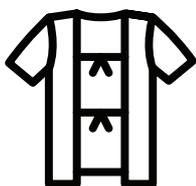|		
	Surgical masks	Surgical masks are disposable masks that cover the mouth and nose of the wearer. They act as a physical barrier to prevent transmission of droplets and fluid. Surgical masks are graded as level 1, 2 and 3, with higher levels indicating a higher degree of protection. They should fit snugly over the mouth and nose, and should be changed when they become damp or damaged. Surgical masks are a single use item and can be worn for up to four hours before being disposed of.
	Respirators (P2 / N95 masks)	Respirators are a type of mask that covers the mouth and nose with a tight seal. If worn correctly, they filter the air to prevent the transmission of airborne infectious agents. Respirators come in two main types: surgical and non-surgical. Surgical respirators are fluid resistant, while non-surgical respirators are not. Most respirators are disposable, and some also contain valves. Respirators with one-way valves are not recommended for use around other people who are not also wearing respirators, as the exhaled air is not filtered. P2 and N95 are two common types of respirators, and have similar standards and uses.
	Reusable cloth masks	Reusable cloth masks cover the nose and mouth and can be washed and reused multiple times. They are sometimes called utility masks, cloth masks or fabric masks, and come in various styles. It is recommended that reusable cloth masks are made of three layers of fabric, with a water resistant outer layer. Reusable cloth masks are not regulated by the TGA and do not need to be included on the ARTG. Reusable masks are for community use and are not for use in medical settings. They should not be worn if they are damp, and should be washed with soap at least once a day, preferably in hot water.
	Face shields/ Visors	Face shields, or visors, are a thin sheet of plastic that is designed to cover the whole face. Face shields protect the eyes and face from large droplets and splashes of body fluids. They can be worn over the top of other PPE, such as a mask. There are many designs and may have a foam or plastic headband, or arms like glasses. The plastic should be anti-fog. Reusable and disposable types are available.
	Goggles and eyewear	Surgical goggles and eyewear shield the wearer's eyes from bodily fluids and large droplets. They have side shields to provide additional protection for the eyes. Some surgical goggles and eyewear can be made with prescription lenses.

HAND PROTECTION

Gloves

Gloves are used to protect the wearer's hands from bodily fluids and contamination. There are three main types of gloves; sterile, non-sterile and reusable utility gloves. Sterile gloves are required for surgical procedures and procedures which require a sterile field, while non-sterile gloves are suitable for most other healthcare procedures and food-handling. Reusable utility gloves are used for non-patient procedures, such as cleaning. Gloves can be made from different materials, most commonly natural rubber latex, nitrile and vinyl. Some people have allergies to latex so synthetic (nitrile and vinyl) materials are a good alternative.

Hand sanitiser

Hand sanitisers contain ingredients that kill microorganisms on the skin. The two most common hand sanitisers are ethanol hand sanitisers and isopropyl alcohol hand sanitisers. Effective hand sanitisers should contain *at least 60% ethanol or isopropyl alcohol*. Other common ingredients include purified water, glycerol and hydrogen peroxide. Hand sanitisers that make therapeutic claims (such as being effective against viruses) must either be included on the ARTG or meet specific formulation, manufacturing, labelling and advertising requirements, which are available on the [TGA website](#).
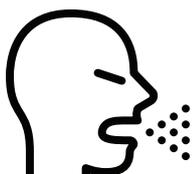
BODY PROTECTION

Gowns and aprons

Gowns and aprons are coverings used to protect the body and clothing from fluids and other infectious substances. Gowns usually tie up at the back of the body. There are many types of gowns, and the type of gown required will depend on the level of protection needed. Most gowns are single use and disposable. They are usually made from nonwoven fabrics such as meltblown and spunbound fabrics, which means they are not knitted or sewn together like traditional fabrics. Gowns are often reinforced, either with additional layers of fabric or with a layer of polyester film. Fabric items such as scrubs and washable gowns are generally not regulated by the TGA and are not designed to prevent the transmission of disease.

Shoe coverings

Shoe coverings act as a physical barrier between the shoe and the environment. They can be used to keep floors sterile from any material that may be brought in via footwear, and they can also help protect the wearer from splashes, soiling or contaminants. Most shoe coverings are single use only. They are typically made from a polyethylene fabric. They are usually one size fits all.

OTHER

Perspex screens/ sneeze guards

Perspex screens, also called sneeze guards, can be considered for workplaces where people are in close contact with each other for long periods. Under the current Australian Government advice it is not necessary to install perspex screens, however many businesses are choosing to install these barriers, for example in supermarkets and retail stores. Perspex screens come in many different sizes and shapes and can be custom made for specific workplaces. Completing a risk assessment will assist you in deciding what kind of screen will work best in your workplace.

Signage

Signage is an important addition around a workplace to remind workers and the general public of the risks of COVID-19 and highlight measures that need to be taken to stop its spread. Signage and posters are available for free download on the [Safe Work Australia website](#).