SPIT GUARDS - Operating Use/Procedures

The ‘Spit Guard’ is a breathable material face and head covering that prevents the wearer from being able to assault by spitting, preventing a potential assault and transfer of diseases.

The application of the guard on a detained person is a use of force and a Use of Force form must be completed for every operational use of a spit guard.

Its use should be carefully assessed using the National Decision Model (NDM). The justification for use of the guard remains with the person applying it or instructing it to be applied. The use of a spit guard may be justified where in Exceptional Circumstances there is clear evidence of spitting now or a clear and tangible threat of spitting being carried out by the subject. It should always be borne in mind that the use of a spit guard is exceptional and must be justified.

Situations regularly encountered where the use of a spit guard may be justified (subject to appropriate risk assessment) are recognised as follows:
- Moving a person from the scene of an arrest to a police vehicle;
- Placing a person into a police vehicle or cell;
- Transporting a person to a location (custody suite, place of safety).

Officers using a spit guard must issue a warning for the benefit of the subject, onlookers and other officers, similar to the warning given before the use of other Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). The warning should be words similar to: "I am requesting you to stop spitting. To protect myself and others I am placing a spit guard over your head”

Prior to a deployment (along with other checks of PPE) officers should ensure that the spit guard is new and undamaged and ready for use.

The spit guard requires sufficient officers working together to control the subject to correctly apply it. This usually requires at least two officers. The subject should always be handcuffed to the rear before the spit guard is used to prevent the subject from removing the guard.

Under no circumstances should a detainee be left unattended (they must be under constant supervision) whilst wearing a spit guard due to the risk of such things as asthmatic attacks, positional asphyxia, and the subject vomiting. The spit guard must not be used on anyone that is vomiting, having difficulty breathing, or is bleeding profusely and excessively from the mouth or nose area.

Eyewear should be removed from the subject if possible prior to a guard being fitted. Consideration must also be given to any jewellery or body piercing worn by the subject that may interfere with the guard whilst being worn in particular if it may prevent the guard being removed quickly in the event of a medical emergency.

Officers must bring to the attention of the Custody Officer the fact that a detained person has been restrained and a spit guard applied. This fact must be recorded upon the Custody record. The use of a spit guard does not in itself require an automatic medical examination on arrival. Any such examination in police custody is a consideration for the Custody Officer taking into account all the prevailing circumstances.

Once used, the spit guard should be disposed of as a Bio-Hazard, as per local arrangements.
Quick Guide

Always;
- use the National Decision Model, it will help you make the right decision and will assist you in justifying your actions as being reasonable, proportionate and appropriate.
- explain to the subject the reasons for using a guard.
- ensure that the spit guard is new and undamaged and ready for use.
- closely monitor the subject.
- record the subject’s threat to spit or spitting in pocket book, custody record, use of force forms, Intelligence logs, PNC as required.
- maintain the dignity of the subject wearing the guard, ensuring the guard is in place only for as long as is necessary.

Never;
- leave the subject unattended.
- use on a subject who has breathing difficulties, vomiting or bleeding.
- use a guard as a punishment.
- allow a guard to become soaked.

Training
All officers and staff will receive training in the use of the spit guard during their Officer Safety Training (OST).

More information on spit guards can be found on page 82 of the NPCC Personal Safety Manual Module 4 Medical Implications.