

Advice and Guidance on the use of Spit Guards within Norfolk and Suffolk

What is a Spit Guard and what is its purpose?

The Spit Guard is designed to reduce the inherent dangers that come with trying to control violent and aggressive subjects, who represent a significant threat to officers, by their actions of spitting and biting. The purpose of the Spit Guard is to restrict the ability of the offender to spit and bite and therefore reduce injuries to officers and subjects, it will also reduce damage to police property.

The Spit Guard has been in use for some years however its use was referred to in an IPCC report dated 22nd June 2012 in relation to a death in custody in Cambridgeshire in 2009. The report criticised officers for leaving the man in question in a Spit Guard for two short periods in a police van whilst unsupervised. This was contrary to the force policy and also to the rules on safer detention all forces should adhere to. This however was not a main contributory factor in his death and was dealt with by a recommendation that:

“Officers are adequately trained in the use of specialist equipment such as Spit Guards”.

There are some European Convention of Human Rights reservations about the use of the Spit Guard and that it could be deemed to infringe on Article 3 in relation to the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment. However this right must be balanced against the rights of the persons being spat at and ultimately their rights under Article 2.

Norfolk and Suffolk Constabulary will make Spit Guards available in all PICS and all marked Police Vehicles for use where and when an officer deems it necessary and justifiable.

When can a Spit Guard be used?

As with any use of force, justification for the use of a Spit Guard remains with the individual officers dealing with the subject. The response to a subject that is spitting/biting or threatening to do so must be necessary, proportionate and reasonable in the circumstances.

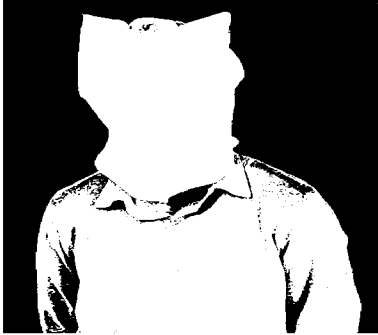
Application of a Spit Guard

The Spit Guard is a very simple yet effective tool. Once a subject is restrained it is simply placed over the subjects head. It is best practice to place the back of the Spit Guard over the back of the head first, pulling it down towards the neck, as this will reduce the chance of the subject realising what is happening and further resisting. This will also reduce the possibility of the spit guard tightening around the throat and neck as effort is made to complete full application. Extra care should be taken on minimising any contact with the eyes, nose or mouth as the remainder of the hood is pulled over the face. At this point it is important not to fasten it too tightly as this can restrict the subjects breathing and/or invoke the gag reflex.



There is only one type of Spit Guard available in Norfolk and Suffolk

Translucent / Loose Type



Translucent / Loose Type

The Translucent / Loose type Spit Guard allows the subject to still see with relative ease. It fastens with elastic around the base. The see through mesh allows staff to monitor the subject easier and reduces anxiety and disorientation in the subject consequently reducing the likelihood of panic attacks and the further problems these cause.

Further Points to note:

- A Spit Guard can be applied to a subject once restrained.
- A spit guard can be used by any **trained** officer or member of staff, authorisation from any rank is not officially required.
- If the subject is wearing spectacles – consider removing them prior to application.
- Ensure the subjects nose and eyes are not interfered with by any elastic banding in the hood.
- Ensure the breathing is not restricted.
- Ensure the subject is constantly monitored whilst wearing a spit guard and properly secured to prevent them from falling.
- Although non solid vomitus can be expelled through the interstices of the spit guard. If the subject vomits the spit guard should be immediately removed to prevent choking.
- If the subject has a nose or mouth bleed do not place the spit guard on.
- If the spit guard becomes very wet, remove and replace the spit guard with a dry one as some hoods will start to degenerate if too wet.
- Every use of a spit guard is a use of force and should be documented accordingly along with the submission of a use of force form.
- All spit guards are single use only and should be disposed of as a biohazard.

ANY SUBJECT WEARING A SPIT GUARD WILL BE CONSTANTLY SUPERVISED AT ALL TIMES.

Any further questions please contact your Personal Safety Training Team.