

Head and Arm Coverings in the Clinical Environment: Guidance for Students

This guidance applies to all students studying for health professional degrees in clinical settings, both on campus and within local NHS trusts.¹

It is designed to ensure that you are able to maintain patient safety while also adhering to any religious or faith-based dress codes in clinical settings.

Please note:

Policies of individual health providers override this guidance. Individual organisations have ultimate discretion over dress codes at their clinical sites, based on patient safety and care considerations.

Head Coverings

You are allowed to wear head coverings such as the hijab, turban, head scarves and kippah/yarmulke for religious reasons. However, these coverings should be clean, secured neatly and unadorned.

For hygiene reasons, head coverings should be washed at 60°C.

If you are working within an operating theatre or infection-control area, you may be required to wear an additional theatre cap, orthopaedic hood or disposable hijab.

Full-face coverings (for example, the niqab) are not supported, since most placement providers do not allow them for reasons of identification, communication and infection control.

Arm Coverings

For reasons of infection-control, staff working in clinical environments are required to be 'bare below the elbow'. However, we recognise that you may feel uncomfortable adhering to this requirement due to religious reasons and principles of modesty.

As such, you may wear full-length or three-quarter sleeves when not engaged in direct patient care activities or handwashing, where sleeves should always be rolled back to the elbow.

Alternatively, you may wear single-use disposable over-sleeves, elasticated at the wrist and elbow. These should be used in the same way as disposable gloves.

Sikh students are permitted to wear the Kara (a sacred bracelet made of steel). However, where possible, this should be pushed above the elbow and secured there for direct patient contact. Where this is not possible, disposable over-sleeves should be worn.

Further support

- Your Degree Programme Director and/or Director of Studies
- Your School's EDI Lead and/or Faculty EDI Director
- The [Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care Service](#) in the Student Health and Wellbeing Service
- The Students' Union's [Welfare and Equality Officer](#) and/or [Faith and Belief Officer](#).

¹ This guidance has been developed by the Faculty of Medical Sciences' Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity group, with input from faculty colleagues, students and NHS providers. Many thanks to colleagues at Birmingham University. The University of Exeter and University College London, upon whose guidance this document is based.

