

# Do anaesthetists need to wear surgical masks in the operating theatre? A literature review with evidence-based recommendations

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## Abstract

Many operating theatre staff believe that the surgical face mask protects the healthcare worker from potentially hazardous biological infections. A questionnaire-based survey, undertaken by Leyland<sup>1</sup> in 1993 to assess attitudes to the use of masks, showed that 20% of surgeons discarded surgical masks for endoscopic work. Less than 50% did not wear the mask as recommended by the Medical Research Council. Equal numbers of surgeons wore the mask in the belief they were protecting themselves and the patient, with 20% of these admitting that tradition was the only reason for wearing them. Policies relating to the wearing of surgical masks by operating theatre staff are varied. This indicates some confusion about the role of the surgical mask in modern surgical and anaesthetic practice. This review was undertaken to collate current evidence and make recommendations based on this evidence.

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