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| Supporting healthcare workers who are unable to shave due to religious, cultural or medical reasons  |
| Information about the Singh Thattha trialSeptember 2022 |
| OFFICIAL |

Providing a safe working environment for all healthcare workers is a priority. A critical part of keeping healthcare workers safe is providing respiratory protective equipment, which includes face masks (N95/P2 respirators).

#### Fit testing and face masks

Healthcare workers are required to undertake a fit test to determine if a face mask appropriately fits the wearer and that it provides suitable protection against airborne pathogens like COVID-19, measles, seasonal influenza. A fit test determines whether an appropriate seal can be formed by the mask against the wearer’s face.

According to international and Australian standards, whenever someone is wearing a mask, they must be clean shaven. Even a small amount of stubble will interrupt the seal of the mask against the wearer’s face thereby significantly reducing the effectiveness of the mask.

#### Singh Thattha

The Singh Thattha or the under-mask beard cover technique is a new technique, which may enable those who are unable to shave for medical, cultural or religious reasons to undertake fit testing and then wear a face mask.

The Singh Thattha involves using an elastic band to cover the beard to create a smooth surface, and it is then tied on top of the wearer’s head. A face mask is then worn over the band.

#### A new trial for all Victorian healthcare workers

The Royal Melbourne Hospital is conducting a clinical trial to assess the effectiveness of the Singh Thattha technique. Any Victorian healthcare worker who is unable to shave due to a religious, cultural or medical reason can take part in the trial. Workers from all Victorian health services can participate.

Participants in the trial:

* attend an initial fit testing and training session so they can learn how to do the Singh Thatta technique
* participate in surveys and follow-up sessions to monitor their progress.
* need to talk to their health service/hospital about participating in the trial before they register their interest. Health services will be supported through this process to undertake local risk assessments.

#### Contact details to participate in the trial

If your community has members who are healthcare workers who are interested in the trial, please contact the Royal Melbourne Hospital Respiratory Protection Program team:

* Telephone: 9342 5590
* Email: RespiratoryProtectionProgram@mh.org.au.

All community groups are encouraged to promote the trial through their networks to healthcare workers from their community who are unable to shave due to religious, cultural or medical reasons.

#### Other enquiries

For any other queries about this initiative or if you would like to discuss the trial, please contact the Department via the following email address: whwb@health.vic.gov.au

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