Hygiene and cleanliness practices were inadequate – workers failed to realise the importance of proper, regular cleaning of their PPE and of basic personal hygiene, such as washing of hands.

Infections that have been contracted range from minor sore throats to the more severe cellulitis, a bacterial infection of the skin and tissues beneath the skin. Cellulitis usually becomes apparent by a red swollen/inflamed area of skin which can be quite painful; the bacteria can spread rapidly through the body leading to fever, chills and sweating.

**BACKGROUND**

There have been several incidents where workers who need to wear PPE during their daily work routine have caught severe bacterial infections in the eyes, ears and throat due to poor cleanliness and hygiene issues. Following investigations into these incidents two common types of bad practice were observed:

Some employees had become accustomed to placing smaller items of PPE such as gloves, eye protection and ear defenders inside their safety helmets during breaks to keep them all together. What the workers did not recognise was that the hot and sweaty environment inside the worn helmet provides a moist, warm and organically rich environment that is perfect for harmful bacteria to grow.

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**PRACTICAL GUIDANCE**

Workers and managers should receive instruction on the safe, correct use of PPE, which may include formal training courses, toolbox talks, information booklets and so forth. Issues relating to storage, cleanliness and hygiene should be included.

Non disposable PPE should be maintained and cleaned thoroughly, at regular intervals, in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions.

Disposable items of PPE, such as disposable ear defenders/plugs, should be used once only then safely disposed of.

Items of PPE should not be shared with other employees – as the name says it is ‘personal’ and for use only by the person it is provided for.

Safety helmets should not be used to store other items of PPE in or as a convenient container to carry any other small items about, such as nails and screws.

PPE items must be properly stored when not in use; this may be a clean, dry cupboard for larger items or boxes/cases for smaller ones.

All workers should ensure that they undertake a proper personal hygiene routine during the working day, such as thorough washing of hands (and face) using soap or other suitable cleanser.

Any cuts or grazes should be treated by a qualified first aider and covered as appropriate to prevent infection; if there is any doubt, then a healthcare professional should be consulted.

PPE must comply with the requirements of the Personal Protective Equipment Regulations 2002 and be ‘CE’ marked to show that it conforms to certain basic safety requirements.

SAFETY ALERT (ALT-018)
Personal Protective Equipment Hygiene

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