



SBS Guidance on the Use of Mobile Phones and Headphones

1 Scope

In our modern society the use of personal mobile devices such as phones, tablets, laptops and headphones is ubiquitous however, we must understand the importance of being able to react to alarms.

We must also appreciate that in laboratories and other high-risk environments, such as workshops, these devices present a particular hazard in terms of:

- The risk of the device being contaminated by chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) material if taken into and used in these environments.
- The risk of transferring the contamination from these devices to hands, surfaces etc. The potential use of devices while eating, for example, could result in ingestion of the CBR substance.
- Causing distraction to the user such that they make a safety critical mistake which leads to injury, ill health or otherwise affects the work activity / equipment / environment.
- The user not being able to hear safety instructions and / or audible alarm conditions (e.g. fire alarms, warning alarms on equipment or verbal communications from colleagues) due to wearing earbuds / headphones etc.

2 Protocol

With the above in mind the following measures must be applied and incorporated into local lab procedures / risk assessments:

- **Within an office setting, headphones may be worn however they must first be checked to ensure that the user is still able to hear the fire alarm. This should be tested during the weekly fire alarm test.**
- **The use of mobile telephones must be avoided within the laboratory environment. Any personal mobile phone calls should be made / taken out-with the laboratory. If required for use for work activity, they may be used when placed in a suitable sealable plastic pouch such as those used to operate phones underwater, this allows for appropriate decontamination if required.**
- **Headphones or earbuds must not be worn within the laboratory environment unless required as part of a reasonable adjustment request. A request for headphones should be risk assessed by the line manager.**
- **No personal devices should be charged in a laboratory environment.**

This guidance does not affect the use of radios in the laboratory. Any radios used with the laboratory should be designated for sole use in the laboratory and should not be taken in and out.

3 Reasonable Adjustments

It is recognised that some individuals may require the use of headphones within the laboratory to accommodate for reasonable adjustments. A request for headphones should be risk assessed by the line manager. The following must be considered;

- Consideration of the possibility of wearing one earbud or bone conduction headphones to allow for awareness of the surrounding environment.
- Gloves must be removed and hands washed prior to removal/placement of headphones/earbuds.
- Any headphones or earbuds must be compatible with any personal protective equipment (PPE) required such as ear, eye, face protection.
- Headphones/earbuds must not be placed on the laboratory bench or equipment.
- An awareness within the lab that an individual is wearing headphones and may have reduced awareness of their surroundings.
- An understanding of how to decontaminate headphones/earbuds should this be required.

For assistance on creating a suitable risk assessment to consider reasonable adjustments, please contact sbsafety@ed.ac.uk

4 Version Control

Document Reference:	SBS HS G17
Date of Review:	
Date of Next Review:	06.08.2027

V2.0	06.08.2025	New Document.

Alternative Format

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact The SBS Health and Safety team on sbsafety@ed.ac.uk