

Stop and Search of people of different gender to the searching officer

Stop and search is a legitimate power that is used by the Metropolitan Police Service to protect Londoners, tackle crime and keep our streets safe.

It is legitimate for an officer of any sex to stop and search a person of any sex providing the search is in public and is restricted to a superficial examination of outer garments. An officer can also place his or her hand inside the pockets of outer clothing, and feel round the inside of collars, socks and shoes if this is reasonably necessary in the circumstances to look for the object of the search. A person's hair may also be searched in public (subject to the restrictions on removal of headgear).

All stops and searches must be carried out with courtesy, consideration and respect for the person concerned. Every reasonable effort must be made to minimise embarrassment that a person being searched may experience. Therefore, where practicable, an officer of the same sex as the person to be searched should conduct these types of searches, unless an officer of the same sex is not readily available and waiting would unnecessarily delay the length of time taken to conduct the encounter or frustrate the object of the search.

Any search involving the removal of more than an outer coat, jacket, gloves, headgear or footwear, or any other item concealing identity, may only be made by an officer of the same sex as the person searched and may not be made in the presence of anyone of the opposite sex unless the person being searched specifically requests it.

The co-operation of the person to be searched must be sought and, depending on the circumstances (including officer safety), officers should consider asking the person to be searched if they want the search to take place out of public view. Where there may be sensitivities (religious or other) about the removal of a head or face covering or other clothing, the officer should permit the item to be removed out of public view.

Some people, particularly those under 18 years' of age, may be more vulnerable and have greater concerns about the encounter when approached or questioned by officers. A negative stop and search encounter can have a long (even lifetime) effect on a child or young person. Officers need to be tolerant, patient and aware of any concerns when seeking co-operation.

Where there is doubt as to the sex of a person, the person should be sensitively and with dignity asked what gender they consider themselves to be. They will then be treated by officers as their elected gender.