



Why Teaching Children About NIHL Prevention Matters

Children, just like adults, are at risk for noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL). This type of hearing loss occurs when tiny sensory hair cells in the inner ear are damaged by noises that are too loud and that last for too long. NIHL is permanent.

Hearing health is important, as even a small loss of hearing can diminish a child's quality of life forever. The ability to hear well helps children succeed in school, in sports and other activities, and in their personal relationships. As adults, the quality of their hearing health may affect some of their job opportunities.

Many sources of noise that can potentially damage the hearing of children are part of their daily, normal lives. Some potential sources of NIHL include:

- Yard work and workshop tools.
- Concerts of all music types.
- Sporting events, hunting, and other leisure time activities.
- Trains, planes, all-terrain vehicles, tractors, and other vehicles.
- School cafeterias and food courts.

Most young people, however, are not aware of NIHL or how they can prevent it. In a survey conducted by the MTV Web site, only 16 percent of teens and young adults who responded reported that they had heard, read, or seen any information on NIHL.

Even when young people understand the risk of NIHL, they do not always follow through by adopting habits that protect their hearing. These habits are simple, such as turning down the volume on entertainment systems (e.g., MP3 players) or wearing earplugs or earmuffs in noisy environments. One study of college students found that even among those who knew about NIHL, almost three quarters had never worn hearing protectors.

These examples show why it is important to teach children about the causes and prevention of NIHL early on, so that healthy hearing habits become a natural choice. Just as you want your children to develop healthy eating habits to prevent their becoming overweight, you will want them to develop healthy hearing habits to prevent NIHL.

A good age to educate children about healthy hearing habits is when they are between ages 8 and 12, or the "tweens." Tweens are in that "between" stage — no longer little children but not quite teens. At this age, they are developing as individuals, starting to act independently, and beginning to make some of their own choices.





They also are developing their own health-related attitudes and habits, which can help or hurt their health for a lifetime. This age is a perfect opportunity to encourage

tweens to adopt healthy hearing habits *before and during* the time that they develop their own listening, leisure, and working habits.

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) sponsors *It's a Noisy Planet. Protect Their Hearing*. This national public education campaign is designed to increase awareness among parents of children ages 8 to 12 about the causes and prevention of noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL). With this information, parents and other adults can encourage children to adopt healthy hearing habits before and during the time that they develop listening, leisure, and working habits. To find out more about how to protect your hearing and that of your family, visit the Noisy Planet Web site at www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov.

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