Decibels are a logarithmic scale, which ear damage to occur. 8 hours of exposure to an 85 dB noise for listen to it before it starts damaging your louder the sound, the less time you can 85 dB can be dangerous, depending on how long you’re exposed to it. Even a mild hearing loss can lead to difficulties with children’s educational, emotional, social and speech development that can have far-reaching consequences as they get older.

Children with hearing loss can have:
• Difficulty speaking and understanding speech.
• Problems in academic achievement.
• Lower scores in verbal tests.
• Problems following directions.
• Greater need for extra support in the classroom.
• Reluctance to participate in activities with others.
• Feelings of isolation, exclusion, embarrassment, confusion and helplessness.

How can I protect my child’s ears?

Hearing can be damaged by various levels of noise depending on how long you’re exposed. Noise levels are measured in decibels (dB). Your ears can handle up to 80 dB with no problems. But sounds over 85 dB can be dangerous, depending on how long you’re exposed to them. And the louder the sound, the less time you can listen to it before it starts damaging your hearing. For instance, it would take about 8 hours of exposure to an 85 dB noise for ear damage to occur.

Decibels are a logarithmic scale, which means an increase of just 3 dB means the sound is actually TWICE as loud. And that means it will take HALF as long to damage your hearing. So an 88 dB sound will damage your ears in only 4 hours. A 91 dB sound will cause damage in 2 hours, and so on.

So how do you spot an unsafe sound level? These indications should give you an idea:
• You have to raise your voice or shout to be heard.
• It’s too hard to hear someone at arm’s length from you.
• You have pain, ringing or buzzing in your ears after exposure.
• Normal speech sounds muffled or dull after exposure.

How does loud noise affect my child?

Research suggests that hearing damage is occurring at younger ages and more often. Even a mild hearing loss can lead to difficulties with children’s educational, emotional, social and speech development that can have far-reaching consequences as they get older.

Exposure to loud noises for too long can damage fragile hair cells in the inner ear – and once they’re damaged, they don’t recover. People of all ages can develop NIHL because even many recreational activities can damage hearing, including target shooting, hunting, motocross riding, woodworking, playing in a band, going to nightclubs and attending rock concerts. Harmful noises at home may be produced by lawn mowers, leaf blowers, power tools, noisy toys, iPods that are played too loud.

Turn it down!

Hearing loss from noise is on the increase, even among school-aged children, but the good news is it can be prevented.

Listen Up! is a FREE educational outreach programme that teaches children aged 8 to 12 about sound and how their ears work, how loud sounds can cause Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL), and how to stay safe around noise. It’s a free resource that teaches physics, anatomy, general science, and valuable health lessons all at the same time.

To book an Educator for your school visit www.listenup.co.nz

Remember, if you have to shout to be heard, it is too loud. To prevent hearing loss from loud noise:
• Turn it down or turn it off.
• Walk away.
• Wear hearing protection.

* Elena Keith is from Pindrop Foundation www.pindrop.org.nz

By Elena Keith*

About Listen Up!

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nihl.org.nz

www.listenup.co.nz

Earmuffs. Usually 'flanged' (made with ridges that make them look like little Christmas trees) to reduce sound. The earplugs that musicians and other professionals use are typically of this kind. (Please note that earplugs are not advisable for children under 5 as they can be a choking hazard. Some earplugs in the flange style are suitable for children over the age of 7.)

3. Earmuffs. Usually consist of two plastic 'cups' filled with sound-deadening material (typically acoustic foam) and held tightly on the ears by an adjustable headband.

When it comes to hearing protection for babies, toddlers and older children, appropriately-sized earmuffs are generally the best choices. Adult earmuffs are not ideal for young children because the cups are too large, allowing sound to 'leak' around the edges.

How do I know if my family members have NIHL?

When a person is exposed to loud noise over a long period of time, symptoms of NIHL will emerge gradually. Over time, the sounds a person hears may become distorted or muffled, and it may be difficult for that person to understand speech. Someone with NIHL may not even be aware of the loss, but it can be detected with a hearing test.

If you suspect you or your child may have hearing loss, get your hearing assessed by an audiologist (a hearing specialist) or your GP.