



Media release

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Living loud: Noisy leisure activities set to cause hearing loss in young Australians

A new report launched by Australian Hearing at the 2010 Audiology Australia National Conference in Sydney today shows that many young Australians are at risk of hearing loss from their leisure activities.

The report, titled *Binge Listening: Is exposure to leisure noise causing hearing loss in young Australians?* shows the risk of hearing damage in young Australians who frequent loud nightclubs, live music venues and concerts.

Research conducted by Australian Hearing's research arm, the National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL) has shown noise levels at nightclubs can range between 91 and 106 decibels, with an average of 98 decibels. Noise measures taken at concerts and live music venues averaged at over 92 decibels. Noise at 100 decibels can cause damage after 15 minutes, while noise at 94 decibels can start causing damage after an hour.

The report, based on a survey of 1,000 18-35 year olds, showed that 15 per cent of young people go to pubs once a week or more while nine per cent go to nightclubs once a week or more. A further 10 per cent go to nightclubs once a fortnight. The vast majority of people stay for more than an hour and 54 per cent stay more than three hours. Despite the high sound levels, 15 per cent stay for more than five hours.

According to Professor Harvey Dillon, research director at NAL, some young Australians are at high risk of hearing damage and hearing loss from their current leisure activities and remain unaware of their risk.

"The research shows that young people who attend nightclubs regularly are also more likely to go to live bands, concerts and play their personal stereos louder than those who go to nightclubs infrequently," Professor Dillon said.

The report also shows that those who are receiving dangerous doses of leisure sound already report more symptoms of hearing loss than those who are receiving safe doses, despite all those in the survey being less than 35 years of age. This occurred whether the dangerous doses came from public events like nightclubs and dance parties, or from MP3 player use.

"The effect of noise on hearing is cumulative, which means these people are at a high risk of hearing loss from their current leisure activities. However, while most young people are aware of the link between exposure to loud noise and hearing damage, many are not changing their behaviours and don't seem to consider themselves to be at personal risk," Professor Dillon said.

The report showed that seven in 10 people interviewed assessed their own risk of permanent hearing loss as “small or very small”, even though many of them had reported one or more symptoms of hearing loss.

The survey data were supplemented by information collected from people who for four days wore “dosimeters”; small devices that measure the surrounding noise level in decibels.

The results showed that for some of the participants who wore dosimeters, their weekend leisure noise exposure exceeded the weekly workplace noise limit. The report refers to this cumulative phenomenon as “binge listening”.

“Young people need to be provided with options to enable them to access lower levels of leisure noise. Nightclubs, pubs, live music and dance venues have a responsibility to their patrons to reduce the risk that excessive noise levels are exposing young Australians to,” Professor Dillon said.

In helping to launch the report, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion, Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens said it was widely acknowledged that hearing loss could have a significant impact on people’s emotional well being because of feelings of frustration, isolation and breakdowns in communication.

“We know from past research that people who develop hearing loss later in life can experience feelings of isolation and detachment. This is one of the reasons why preventing damage is so important for younger Australians,” Senator Stephens said.

Minister for Human Services, the Hon Chris Bowen MP, also encouraged young Australians to protect their hearing.

“While the report shows that almost half of people aged 18-35 are taking steps to protect their hearing, more young people need to be aware of the risk, not just from personal stereos, but from all sources of loud leisure noise,” Minister Bowen said.

The most significant single cause of hearing loss in Australia is exposure to loud noise. According to a 2006 report by Access Economics, hearing loss is still common and set to rise from one in six to one in four Australians by 2050¹.

Anyone who is concerned about their hearing can take a test over the telephone by calling Telscreen™ toll free on 1800 826 500.

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For more information or a copy of the report, contact Martin Palin (mpalin@palin.com.au 0418 419 258) or Karina Candia (karina@palin.com.au 0402 307 056) at Palin Communications (02 9412 2255).