

Health Hints

Protect Your Hearing

(NAPS)—“Nearly all noise-induced hearing loss is preventable,” said William Hal Martin, PhD, developer of Dangerous Decibels, a proven hearing-protection program now being tested with American Indian youth in the Pacific Northwest. If successful, the program could help preserve identity as well as hearing.

“To tribal peoples, hearing is so important,” said William Lambert, PhD, associate director of The Center for Healthy Communities Prevention Research Center (PRC) at the Oregon Health and Science University. The PRC is part of a network of 37 academic and community partnerships funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to find health promotion strategies.

“In many cultures,” Dr. Lambert noted, “traditions, songs, language and skills are passed from older adults to children through stories and conversation. Losing one’s hearing can mean missing out on these treasured activities.”

American Indians are two to four times as likely as Americans in general to report hearing loss, in part due to noise on the job and in leisure activities. About 15 percent (26 million) of Americans aged 20 to 69 have noise-induced hearing loss. Researchers are assessing whether people can learn to prevent hearing loss and avoid the social isolation that can result.

From classroom lessons and museum- and Web-based learning materials, fourth and fifth grade American Indian students participating in the Dangerous Decibels study learn how sound intensity is measured on a decibel scale. The students see photographs of healthy and damaged cells in the ear and put earphones on a man-



Music to your ears should not be so loud as to endanger your hearing.

nequin that displays the decibel level of music played at different volumes. The kids then host a community event and teach their families about hearing protection. The researchers test the children’s knowledge before and after the program and train teachers to run the program.

“By educating people about noise exposure when they are young,” Dr. Lambert said, “hearing loss may be prevented.”

Learn more about the PRC program at www.cdc.gov/prc and Dangerous Decibels at www.dangerousdecibels.org.

Tips For All Ears

- The ears can safely take in busy street sounds—85 decibels—for eight hours a day. For louder sounds, turn down the volume, walk away or use earmuffs or earplugs.
- Try the 80/90 rule with personal music players: Listening at 80 percent maximum volume is safe for 90 minutes. You can listen safely at 60 percent maximum volume all day.
- If someone at arm’s length from you listens to music and has to remove an earbud to hear you speak, the music probably is too loud.

Healthy Ideas

Public health experts and communities working in the Prevention Research Centers (PRC) network help find new ways to stay healthy. Learn more about the PRC network and its support through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/prc.

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