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**The American Academy of Audiology Recommends Protecting Your Hearing from** **Loud Outdoor Noise Exposure**

Loud lawn equipment, fireworks, gunfire,

**RESTON,** **Va., May 26, 2020—**As summer nears, the American Academy of Audiology is warning the public to protect its hearing when exposed to loud outdoor sounds—from fireworks to lawn equipment to road equipment, blasting and gunfire, many of these are dangerous for hearing.

As temperatures increase across the country and more regions open up to outdoor shopping and dining, more Americans will be spending a greater amount of time outdoors. At the same time, the numbers of Americans facing hearing loss is at a record high and rising annually. Outdoor activities can pose a significant threat to hearing health. [More than 40 million](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6605e3.htm?s_cid=mm6605e3_w) Americans have some type of hearing loss with approximately [10 million](https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/noise-induced-hearing-loss) of those attributable to sound-induced hearing loss—exposure to loud sounds. The American Academy of Audiology states that prolonged exposure to sounds above 85 decibels can damage hearing; louder sounds damage hearing in a shorter period of time.

To put that into perspective, noise from fireworks can reach up to 155 decibels. A jet plane taking off is estimated to be 150 decibels. Shooting a gun is around 140-175 decibels (depending on the gun). A [report](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4909058/) in Environ Health Insights looks at noise exposure from the use of outdoor equipment with regard to recommendations by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

But it’s not just the decibel levels that matter. The amount of time of the exposure is also important. If you spend multiple hours on a loud riding mower, running a chain saw, working a weed eater, leaf blower or other equipment, you may experience hearing loss. According to the Centers for Disease Control, [loud noise over 120 decibels can cause immediate harm to hearing.](https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss/what_noises_cause_hearing_loss.html)

As the baby boomer population ages, more Americans are forced to face hearing health challenges. According to the National Institutes of Health NIDCD, approximately 15 percent (37.5 million) of American adults aged 20 to 69 have some trouble with 50% of older adults experiencing hearing loss. Approximately 28.8 million could benefit from the use of hearing aids.

While age is still the greatest factor in hearing loss, many younger people also experience hearing problems due to exposure to loud sound including music, hobbies, and occupational noise. Among adults aged 70 and older with hearing loss who could benefit from hearing aids, fewer than one in three (30 percent) has ever used them. With adults aged 20 to 69 only approximately 16 percent of those who would benefit from hearing aids has ever used them.

“The inner ear contains delicate hair cells which do not regrow, explained Catherine Palmer, Ph.D., president of the American Academy of Audiology and audiology program director in the University of Pittsburgh's School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. “Once these are damaged by noise, the result is permanent hearing loss. It’s important for people to use hearing protection when riding all-terrain vehicles, shooting firearms, and using power equipment and tools. Large sporting events and concerts are also a risk for hearing loss without appropriate protection but COVID-19 has put those on hold for quite a while.”

Damaging noise, however, is not only generated by outdoor activities. Many children and adults spend longer amounts of time in the summer using earbuds. Audiologists caution that stock earbuds can produce sounds from 80 to 125 decibels. Some earbuds advertise that they produce sounds as loud as 110 decibels—a number that could cause potential hearing damage, especially with exposure over time. Audiologists caution the public to use portable music safely, or risk hearing loss and potentially tinnitus (ringing in the ears). To ensure safe earphone use, consumers should consider using devices and headsets that provide data about safe volume settings. The newest devices will provide a warning if sound is turned up to levels that could be dangerous. To measure the decibel level of sound around you use one of the many apps available.

Some signs of hearing loss may include:

* Ringing, buzzing, or hissing noises in the ear after the loud noise.
* Muffled hearing after exposure to noise.
* Having to turn up the volume of the television, radio, or stereo and having other family members complain that the volume is too loud.
* Difficulty understanding people speaking to you and asking people to repeat themselves.
* Difficulty with phone conversations and understanding the other person.
* Inability to hear the doorbell, the dog barking, and other household sounds.
* People telling you that you speak too loudly.
* Ringing in the ears.
* Ear pain.

“Children are just as vulnerable and parents need to be vigilant in teaching them the importance of hearing health including (E) earplug use, (A) avoiding loud sounds, (R) reducing the volume of sound, and (S) shortening time in loud sound.” Palmer added.

The American Academy of Audiology recommends that, anyone experiencing the above symptoms should make an appointment with an audiologist. The Academy has a listing of audiologists on its website, [www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org).

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. Representing the interests of approximately 14,000 audiologists nationwide, the Academy is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to [www.howsyourhearing.org](http://www.howsyourhearing.org).