

Children's Health Update

Protect Your Kids' Hearing

(NAPSA)—Kids' ears contend with a lot. Loud music from personal stereos, power mowers, workshop tools, motorcycles, ambulance sirens, concerts, sporting events—and have you been to a school cafeteria recently? Let's face it, it's a noisy planet we live on.

Sounds that are too loud and that last for too long can cause noise-induced hearing loss. People with noise-induced hearing loss have trouble detecting high-pitched sounds—such as certain speech sounds or the voices of women and children. Many also have tinnitus, a disorder that causes a continuous ringing, roaring or clicking in the ears. Once hearing is damaged, it doesn't recover.

Studies show that people who live in rural areas are especially at risk for hearing loss. That's probably because of their exposure to farm machinery and other loud noises.

Even a small loss of hearing can diminish a child's quality of life forever. It can affect school, sports and other activities, as well as relationships. As adults, hearing loss may affect their job opportunities. That's why it's so important to protect hearing at a young age.

"The good news is that there are simple steps that everyone can take to protect their hearing from potentially damaging sounds," says Dr. James F. Battey, Jr., director of the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) at the National Institutes of Health.

Children need to learn about the causes and prevention of noise-induced hearing loss early



on. That way, healthy hearing habits become a natural choice. These habits are simple. They include turning down the volume on a portable media player or wearing earplugs at a concert.

To help, NIDCD has launched a new educational campaign called *It's a Noisy Planet. Protect Their Hearing*. It's focused on "tweens"—kids ages 8 to 12. Reaching kids at this age, while they're forming attitudes and habits related to their health, will help them prevent hearing problems later in life.

So teach them to turn down the volume, to walk away from loud sounds and to wear hearing protection such as earplugs when they're near loud sounds for a long time. For more information, visit the Noisy Planet Web site at www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov. Or contact the NIDCD Information Clearinghouse at (800) 241-1044 or nidcdinfo@nidcd.nih.gov.

You can also learn more from *NIH News in Health*, a publication of the National Institutes of Health, available at newsinhealth.nih.gov.