

One in Five U.S. Adolescents Has Hearing Loss, Researchers Find

By Nicole Ostrow - Aug 17, 2010 5:00 PM GMT-0300

-
- [Email](#)
- [Share](#)
 - [Business Exchange](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
 - [Delicious](#)
 - [Digg](#)
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [LinkedIn](#)
 - [Newsvine](#)
 - [Propeller](#)
 - [Yahoo! Buzz](#)
- [Print](#)

Hearing loss among U.S. adolescents has surged, probably because of the use of devices such as earbuds for listening to music, doctors say.

Researchers surveyed a sample of children ages 12 to 19 in 2005 and 2006 and found that 19.5 percent had some hearing loss, compared with 14.9 percent in a study covering the years 1988 to 1994, according to a report published today in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#). Hearing loss of 25 decibels or more -- enough that the children were often aware of the deficit -- increased to 5.3 percent of the sample, from 3.5 percent in the earlier group.

Listening to loud sounds through earbuds -- the tiny electronic speakers that fit into ears, for use with personal music players -- is probably the main reason that more adolescents are losing some of their hearing, said William Slattery, director of clinical studies at the [House Ear Institute](#), a Los Angeles medical practice, who wasn't involved in today's study.

"Once you have hearing loss, there's a greater risk of that hearing loss progressing as you get older," Slattery, a clinical professor in the Department of Otolaryngology at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, said today in a telephone interview. "Here is a major study that demonstrates that teenagers are having hearing loss in a significant percent of children. It can happen and it does happen."

Teens and parents need to be told that hearing loss from noise that occurs early in life isn't reversible, he said.

Effect in School

Hearing loss may affect teenagers' social development and education, said Gary Curhan, an author of the study, who is an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a physician at Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston.

"In an educational setting, even kids with slight hearing loss do not perform as well as those with normal hearing," [Curhan](#) said in a telephone interview on Aug. 13. "It's potentially preventable."

Curhan said parents whose kids are doing poorly in school may want to get the children's hearing tested because most people with a slight hearing loss don't know a problem exists.

The researchers examined data from the 2005-2006 [National Health & Nutrition Examination Survey](#) and the one conducted from 1988 to 1994.

Boys at Risk

The study showed that males had a higher rate of hearing loss than females. The researchers also found that

The study showed that males had a higher rate of hearing loss than females. The researchers also found that teens whose families were below the poverty line were more likely to have impaired hearing.

Among the signs of potential hearing loss are asking that things be repeated, having difficulty following directions, listening to the television at a loud volume, having problems with speech and language, and having trouble identifying sounds, said [Denise Miller-Hansen](#), a pediatric audiologist at Children's Mercy Hospitals & Clinics, in Kansas City, Missouri, who wasn't involved in today's study.

"The key to prevention is education and getting it out there in the public domain so that people know about hearing loss and the possibility of hearing loss in children," Miller-Hansen said today in a telephone interview. "We also need studies to look at causative factors for the hearing loss."

Curhan said it's unclear how [loud](#) and how long teens need to listen to personal music players such as Apple Inc.'s iPod for hearing loss to occur. Parents can set a [volume limit](#) on their children's iPods and lock them with a code.

In December, Apple won a federal appeals court ruling upholding dismissal of a lawsuit that claimed the iPod and headsets sold with it are defective and the company doesn't adequately warn about the possibility of hearing loss.

Today's study was sponsored by the Massachusetts Eye & Ear Infirmary Foundation and the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine Development Funds.

To contact the reporter on this story: [Nicole Ostrow](#) in New York at nostrow1@bloomberg.net.