

Protecting your hearing at work

Do you often have to raise your voice to be heard at work?

Do you work in noisy environments for multiple hours a day?

If so, you could be one of the 1.1 million employees in Australia that are exposed to hazardous levels of noise at work¹.

Noise induced hearing loss is one of the most common causes of preventable hearing loss.

When a person is exposed to harmful noises at work, their hearing can be damaged permanently. This can be caused by a very loud sudden sound such as an explosion or it can happen over time from regular exposure to noise.

Certain chemicals known as ototoxic substances² and exposure to hand-arm-vibration can also contribute to hearing loss³.

The best way to protect your hearing is to know what the risks are and how to avoid them. This means knowing what noise levels are dangerous and putting controls in place to limit your exposure.

How loud is too loud?

Many workplaces are noisy. Noise exposure in the workplace is considered hazardous if it exceeds the Australian noise exposure standard⁴. Generally, if you or someone else needs to shout over the noise to be heard when you are 1 metre apart, the noise is too loud.

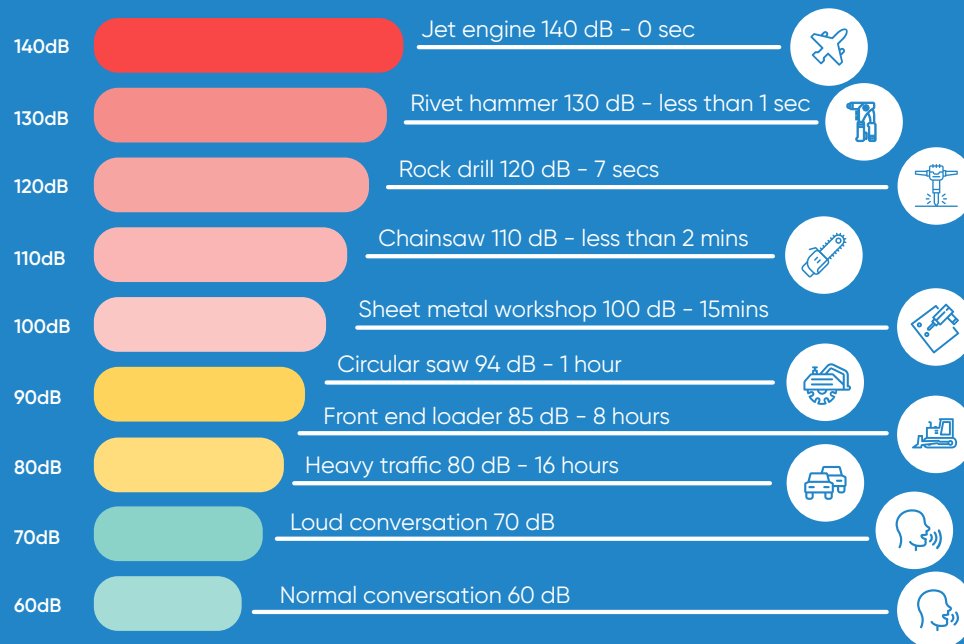
Some work activities are louder than others. There are limits on a worker's "daily dose" of noise exposure before an employer must take action to reduce exposure. This is 85 decibels weighted average during any 8 hour period. An employer has a duty to implement controls to minimise risk from noise.

The infographic below shows some common examples of noise sources and indicative time limits on daily exposure before damage is likely to occur. As the noise increases, the time you can safely be exposed to the noise decreases.

Exposure to noise can have a cumulative effect. Repeated or long term exposure to noisy work environments or activities may expose you to an increased risk of damage to your hearing.

Noise Hazards

Common noise sources, their typical sound levels in decibel (dB) and time limits



Adapted from Safe Work Australia⁵

Responsibilities of your employer

Most jurisdictions have adopted the Safe Work Australia model Code of Practice: Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work. The model Code of Practice provides practical guidance to employers on how noise exposure can affect hearing, how to identify and assess exposure to noise and how to control health and safety risks arising from hazardous noise. The Code of Practice also highlights how your employer should apply the hierarchy of controls to reduce hazardous noise. The most effective controls is eliminating the noise altogether or substituting noisy equipment for quieter equipment. It is likely your employer will need to put in a number of controls to reduce noise exposure. Check with your state or territory regulator for further advice⁶.

What you can do at work

Make sure noise reduction aids such as mufflers on equipment or tools are in working order and report any faults to your employer



Limit the time you spend in noisy environments and have regular breaks in quiet spaces



Wear hearing protection (PPE) provided by your employer and ensure it is the right fit, size and is comfortable to wear



Talk to your employer about making your workplace quieter. Remember, it is an employer's responsibility to provide a safe work environment



Request training on hearing protection and mitigating risk of noise exposure. Get involved in Work Health and Safety activities



Get your hearing checked regularly. Some states and territories may require you to get audiometric testing if your employer provides personal hearing protection. Check with your state or territory regulator for further advice



If you experience ringing in your ears, sounds seem muffled, you frequently ask people to repeat themselves, or you find it difficult following a conversation in a noisy place, you might have hearing damage.

For information about your hearing health or if you have concerns about your hearing, get in contact with our team. Call 134 432.



- 1 Lewkowski K, Heyworth JS, Li IW, Williams W, McCausland K, Gray C, Ytterstad E, Glass DC, Fuente A, Si S, Florath I. Exposure to noise and ototoxic chemicals in the Australian workforce. *Occupational and environmental medicine*. 2019 May 1;76(5):341-8.
- 2 SafeWork NSW 2022 Exposure to ototoxic substances can also cause hearing loss <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/>
- 3 Weier, M.H. The Association Between Occupational Exposure to Hand-Arm Vibration and Hearing Loss: A Systematic Literature Review. *Saf. Heal. Work*. 2020, 11, 249-261.
- 4 Standards Australia 2022 Occupational noise management - Noise control management <https://www.standards.org.au>
- 5 Safe Work Australia 2020 Model Code of Practice: Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-managing-noise-and-preventing-hearing-loss-work>
- 6 Safe Work Australia 2022 WHS Regulators and Workers Compensation Authorities Contact Information <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/law-and-regulation/whs-regulators-and-workers-compensation-authorities-contact-information>

This document is for informational purposes only. More information is available from the appropriate Work Health and Safety Regulator in your state or territory.