

Hearing Concerns

Hearing and Vision difficulties can be a health issue for anyone. Some medical diagnoses carry a higher risk of problems with hearing and vision, e.g. hearing loss in individuals with Down syndrome. If you have a specific special health care need, be sure to look for information about any vision or hearing problems you should be screened for. Some individuals with severe behavior problems and/or severe intellectual disability have delays in diagnosis of hearing and/or vision problems because of difficulties in accessing or cooperating with the examination. However, it is important for everyone to have regular hearing and vision screening.

Hearing Protection - <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/noise/index.htm#2>

Hearing plays an essential role in communication, speech and language development, and learning. Even a small amount of hearing loss can have profound, negative effects on speech, language comprehension, communication, classroom learning, and social development. Approximately 5.2 million children and adolescents aged 6–19 years and about 26 million adults aged 20–69 years have suffered permanent damage to their hearing from excessive exposure to noise. This type of hearing loss, called “noise-induced hearing loss,” is usually caused by exposure to excessively loud sounds. It cannot be medically or surgically corrected. Noise-induced hearing loss can result from a *one-time* exposure to a very loud sound, blast, impulse, **or** by listening to loud sounds over an *extended period*.

To reduce the risk of noise-induced hearing loss, you can do the following:

- Understand that noise-induced hearing loss can lead to communication difficulties, learning difficulties, tinnitus, distorted or muffled hearing, and inability to hear some environmental sounds and warning signals.
- Identify sources of loud sounds (such as gas-powered lawnmowers, snowmobiles, power tools, gunfire, or music) that can contribute to hearing loss.
- Adopt behaviors to protect your hearing:
 - Avoid or limit exposure to excessively loud sounds;
 - Turn down the volume of music systems;
 - Move away from the source of loud sounds when possible; and
 - Use hearing protection devices when it is not feasible to avoid exposure to loud sounds or reduce them to a safe level.
- Seek hearing evaluation by a licensed audiologist or other qualified professional, especially if there is concern about potential hearing loss.

Special Olympics ‘Healthy Hearing’ Program

Reduced hearing can have a significant negative impact upon a Special Olympics athlete's ability to respond to directions in training, as well as understand other oral information from coaches, trainers and judges. The safety of the athlete also can be impeded by a hearing loss, as can the athlete's interpersonal relationships. Screening of hearing is the first step in the process of identifying an athlete's hearing loss and preventing its negative effects from occurring in sporting and social events.

The purpose of Healthy Hearing is to:

- screen the hearing of athletes and notify athletes and their coaches if follow-up care is needed

- provide corrective (hearing aids) and preventative (custom swim earplugs) services where possible, and
- study the prevalence of hearing loss in athletes competing in Special Olympics events.

During a Healthy Hearing screening, athletes are directed through two registration/checkout desks and four screening stations. Many Special Olympics athletes require only the first two stations, examining the ear canals for cerumen (earwax) and an otoacoustic (OAE) hearing screening of both ears.

If athletes pass the OAE station, they exit the screening area. If they do not pass, they are checked again using tympanometry (middle ear) and pure tone screening. Upon completion of all examinations and screenings, the athlete receives a copy of the screening report form which includes follow-up recommendations.