

News

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Sight & Hearing Association releases annual noisy toys list

15 of 19 toys tested pose hearing risk in 15 minutes

ST. PAUL, Minn. — They shake, rattle and roll, most of them meant for children three years or younger. We're referring to the toys on this year's Noisy Toys List, in which 15 of the 19 toys tested by the Sight & Hearing Association sounded off louder than 100 decibels (dBA). The time it takes to risk hearing damage at that level? 15 minutes.

For the 12th year, the nonprofit organization and researchers from the University of Minnesota tested toys — taken right off retailers' shelves — for potentially dangerous sound levels.

The top offender on this year's list, Iron Man Mobile Headquarters Vehicle by Jada Toys, blared at 119.5 dB(A) — loud enough to risk hearing damage in less than eight seconds. Fisher Price's Learning Letters Mailbox, meant for a 6-36 month old, topped out at 113.9 dB; and a book called Sesame Street Help Along Sing a Song measured 112.1 dB. All of those toys are loud enough to risk hearing damage in less than one minute.

Dr. Chris Hilton, an otolaryngology fellow with the University of Minnesota, tested the toys. His take? "Prolonged exposure to any of these toys — at a very close range — could be damaging to the inner ear."

In fact, sounds that are 85 dB or louder can permanently damage your ears. The louder the sound, the less time it takes to cause damage. For example, a sound at 85 dB may take as long as eight hours to cause permanent damage, while a sound at 100 dB can start damaging hair cells after only 15 minutes of listening. According to guidelines by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), part of the Centers for Disease Control, the permissible exposure time (the amount of time you should listen) is cut in half with every 3 decibels over 85 dB.

Because of a child's shorter arm span, toys are often potentially more dangerous to hearing because children hold them closer to their ears. In the Sight & Hearing Association study, the toys were repeatedly tested at distances simulating how a child might hold the toy, directly near the ear (0 inches) and at arm's length (10 inches). A sound-proof acoustic chamber was used to ensure accurate measurements.

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Until 2004, there were no regulations in the United States regarding the loudness of toys. An acoustics standard (ASTM F963), adopted and revised in March 2004 by ASTM International, states that a hand-held, table-top or crib toy cannot exceed 90 dB 25 cm (approx. 10 in.) from the surface of the toy. Compliance with the standard is voluntary.

Directly at the speaker of the toy, all of the toys tested this year measured louder than 90 dB. At 10 inches from the toy's surface, five of the toys measured louder than 90 dB: Road Rippers Turbo Wheelie Corvette (94.8), Transformers PowerBots Megatron Action Figure (94.3 dB), Sesame Street Help Along Sing a Song (91.7 dB), Fisher Price Learning Letters Mailbox (91.5 dB) and Transformers RPMs-Optimus Prime Radio Control AutoBot (91.5 dB).

Unlike with choking hazards and other injuries, there are no injury statistics on toys and hearing loss. That's because noise-induced hearing loss is nearly impossible to track its origination.

To protect a child's hearing, the Sight & Hearing Association offers the following tips:

- Listen to a toy before you buy it. If it sounds loud to you, it's too loud for your child.
- Report a loud toy. Call the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 800/638-2772 or the Sight & Hearing Association at 800/992-0424, or contact us by e-mail at ReportAToy@sightandhearing.org.
- Put masking or packing tape over the speaker on the toy. This will help reduce the volume.
- Buy toys with volume controls.

"Noise-induced hearing loss is cumulative," explains Julee Sylvester, Sight & Hearing Association spokesperson. "It doesn't typically happen from one event; it gradually happens over time. That's why it's important to start protecting hearing at a young age."

The Minnesota-based Sight & Hearing Association, founded in 1939, is dedicated to enabling lifetime learning by identifying preventable vision and hearing loss in children.

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