

Causes of hearing loss in Australia

From Australian Hearing

The most significant cause of hearing loss—[according to Access Economics](#), around 37 per cent of all cases—in Australia is exposure to excessive noise.

Hearing loss can also be acquired through illness, accident, exposure to certain drugs and chemicals, or as part of the normal ageing process.

Why is loud noise so damaging?

Loud noise can cause irreversible hearing damage, as it harms the [delicate hearing mechanism](#) within the inner ear.

Damage to hearing due to noise exposure is cumulative. This means the higher the noise level and the longer your exposure, the greater the harm, making it even more important to [protect your hearing](#).

Many of your daily activities won't harm your hearing, but some activities can start to cause damage after only a short time. For example, vacuuming, at around 65 decibels (dB), is unlikely to damage hearing, but listening to a portable music player at 94 dB for one hour can start to cause damage.

The level of noise at a nightclub, at 100 dB, can be as loud or louder than a chainsaw and this can damage your hearing after just 15 minutes' exposure. Louder sounds, such as a jet plane or gunfire, both of which are more than 110 dB, can cause damage in just one minute.

Hearing loss among children

In Australia, between nine and 12 children per 10,000 live births will be born with a moderate or greater hearing loss in both ears. Around another 23 children per 10,000 will acquire a hearing impairment that requires hearing aids by the age of 17 through accident, illness or other causes. Each year, Australian Hearing fits around 2000 children with hearing aids for the first time.

Otitis media, also known as middle ear infection, is a common childhood complaint often associated with temporary or fluctuating hearing loss. This in turn can affect a child's learning, language development and behaviour. Although it is usually easily treatable, the incidence of *otitis media* is significantly higher among Indigenous children, for whom it represents a serious health and educational problem.

Hearing loss and age

The incidence of hearing loss increases as we get older. It's a part of the natural ageing process, with over half the population aged between 60 and 70 having a hearing loss. This increases to more than 70 per cent of those over the age of 70, and 80 per cent of those over the age of 80.

Hearing loss among veterans

War veterans are likely to suffer from hearing problems due to damage from noise exposure during their service. Hearing is the second most common medical condition reported by Australian war veterans and war widows, with 55 per cent reporting hearing loss as a current medical condition.

Hearing loss among rural Australians

Over half of Australia's farmers are likely to suffer from premature hearing loss through occupational noise exposure from agricultural machinery, tools and pigs in sheds at feeding time. Almost all farmers over the age of 55 who have been exposed to loud noise suffer some degree of hearing loss. However, only 18 per cent of farmers wear hearing protection while working with heavy machinery.