

Rowdy hockey fans can cause hearing damage, say researchers

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During last year's NHL playoffs, Edmonton Oilers' fans tried to earn the title of loudest arena in the game, but new University of Alberta research shows that even a few hours of exposure to that level of noise can be harmful.

Bill Hodgetts a professor in the U of A Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine and Dr. Richard Liu, from the U of A Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry measured the noise levels during games three, four and six during the Stanley Cup finals against the Carolina Hurricanes last year. Liu attended the games and wore a noise dosimeter near his ear every second of the entire game. No matter where he went in the building, the dosimeter would sample his noise exposure. The research is published in the current edition of the Canadian Medical Association Journal.

The researchers found that for the levels experienced in game three, it took less than six minutes to reach the maximum allowable daily noise dose. Put another way, everyone at the game received approximately 8,100 per cent of their daily noise dose without any hearing protection. "Given the vast numbers of fans that do not wear hearing protection to hockey games, thousands are at risk for hearing damage," said the researchers.

Most people don't consider the risk of excessive noise exposure when participating in leisure activities, say the researchers, even though such noise over a period of a few hours can be harmful. "The risk of hearing loss for those who attend hockey games frequently - season ticket

holders, workers in the arena, hockey players themselves - warrants serious consideration," they write in the paper. Even the cheapest foam ear plugs would make a difference.

"People's ears will usually recover after one or two exposures but if they're doing it repeatedly, they're likely to have a problem," said Hodgetts. "The simplest solution is ear plugs and contrary to popular belief, it is easier to communicate in a noisy place when wearing ear plugs than without. It's hard for people to believe, but it's true."

The two most common symptoms of excessive noise exposure are hearing loss and tinnitus, both of which can have a significant negative impact on quality of life.

Source: University of Alberta

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