

Noisy holiday toys are no gift to a child's hearing

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Parents moaning over the noise from a new Christmas toy is a time-honored holiday tradition.

But noisy playthings can do long-lasting damage to a child's hearing, the American Academy of Audiology (AAA) is warning parents.

Tiny ears are particularly susceptible to hearing damage, the AAA says. The inner ear contains delicate hair cells that don't regrow, resulting in [permanent hearing loss](#) if damaged by noise.

What's more, children like to hold toys up to their ears while playing.

That makes it important to check toy noise levels before buying, says AAA President [Bopanna Ballachanda](#).

"Many parents don't realize the [permanent damage](#) a simple toy can inflict on a child's hearing," Ballachanda said in an AAA news release. "When we fail to protect a child's hearing, the result can be irreversible hearing loss."

The [average person](#) is born with about 16,000 [hair cells](#) within their cochlea, the part of the inner ear involved with hearing, the AAA said. Those cells allow the brain to detect [sound](#).

"Noise can also damage the [auditory nerve](#) that carries [electrical signals](#) to the brain," Ballachanda added.

Ballachanda advises parents to use a phone app to test the sound levels of toys before buying them.

"You can't assume that the manufacturer has tested them to ensure hearing safety, especially when children are inclined to hold toys much closer to themselves than adults would," Ballachanda said.

Federal guidelines acknowledge 85 decibels as the level at which noise can cause damage to a person's hearing, if they're exposed to the sound

for extended periods of time, Ballachanda said.

"If they come in at 85 decibels or higher when holding your phone microphone near them, like your child would hold the toy near their own ear, don't buy them. It isn't worth the risk," Ballachanda said.

"Remember, the louder the sound, the faster the damage and damage continues with exposure."

Hearing loss can set a child back in school and in social situations, Ballachanda said.

"A child with just minimal hearing loss can be missing 50 percent of classroom discussion," Ballachanda said.

These children need to use extra effort to hear what is being said, and they often become distracted and exhausted by the end of the day. Their hearing problems also can be mistaken for learning disabilities.

Hearing loss also can lead to behavioral issues, lack of focus and even depression in children, Ballachanda added.

"Loud toys aren't just annoying to [parents](#), they can be a danger to children," added Ballachanda. "Parents should exercise caution when buying toys with sound, including video games. With toys and games where you can turn the sound down, set the sound at an acceptable, non-harmful level and teach [children](#) to keep them at that level. Also, be vigilant about any signs that may indicate your child is having difficulty with their hearing."

Parents concerned about their child's hearing should consider having them undergo a comprehensive hearing test.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention has more about [noise that causes hearing loss](#).

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