

# LISTEN UP!

## Educators Are at Higher Risk for Hearing Loss

Ringling bells, slamming lockers, loud announcements and chattering students – these are just some of the many jarring noises that educators experience on a daily basis. Education is not always top-of-mind as a ‘noisy occupation,’ but it should be. School environments are consistently noisy for a long portion of each and every day, raising the risk of hearing loss among employees; and certain environments, such as gymnasiums and music classrooms, expose teachers and other staff to noise levels that can damage hearing very quickly.

### HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

Hearing loss is an issue of epidemic proportions. Most people are surprised to learn that **nearly one in five Americans suffer from hearing impairment** severe enough to make communication difficult.<sup>i</sup> Contrary to common belief, this problem is not contained to the older population. According to the Better Hearing Institute, the majority (65%) of people with hearing loss are younger than age 65<sup>ii</sup> and still in the workforce.<sup>iii</sup> It’s not just the upper end of that age range that is affected. Hearing loss is an important concern for younger workers as well considering that 7.4% of generation Xers (ages 29-40) already have hearing loss.<sup>iv</sup>

Understanding that educators are at higher risk for hearing loss, EPIC Hearing Healthcare conducted a comprehensive national survey, which uncovered the scope of the problem for teachers specifically.<sup>v</sup> It found that **15% of teachers have a diagnosed hearing problem** (versus 12% of workers overall). It also found that younger (ages 18-44) teachers report diagnosed hearing problems at a higher rate than younger employees in general (26% versus 17%). This suggests that noise exposure from their occupation could be contributing to hearing loss at a younger age among teachers. Probably most importantly, it found that **27% of teachers suspect they have a hearing problem, but have not sought treatment.**



### POP QUIZ – Did you know?

**Male teachers appear to be at an increased risk for hearing loss.**

- According to one Danish study, tinnitus (ringing in the ears) is almost twice as common among male teachers as among males in other professions.
- EPIC research shows that 28% of male teachers report a diagnosed hearing problem, compared with 16% of males in the general population.



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## HOW DOES HEARING LOSS AFFECT MY EMPLOYEES?

A recent study by the Danish Centre of Educational Environment found that noisy indoor climates affect teachers' work days and result in lower job satisfaction, increased fatigue and tiredness, and a lack of energy and motivation.<sup>vi</sup>

Educators not in their prime condition affect those around them – including the students.

According to EPIC's survey, teachers with suspected (but **untreated**) hearing loss say they:

- Often ask people to repeat what they said (51%)
- Often misunderstand what is being said (33%)
- Frequently feel stressed or tired after having to talk or listen for extended periods (24%)

With the majority of teachers agreeing that it is a relief to get a break from the noise of their workplace, it is not surprising that 73% of teachers say they are concerned about their hearing, more than the average concern of 66%. However, teachers are also more sensitive to their employers' thoughts about their hearing loss. **More than half of teachers say they would be concerned if their employer suspected or knew they had hearing loss.** This could be contributing to the high number not seeking treatment.



## WHAT CAN I DO?

**Educate** teachers and other at-risk employees on the ways to prevent hearing loss, including wearing hearing protection if needed and having your hearing checked regularly. Integrate education on the importance of hearing health care into existing health education efforts, such as wellness newsletters and health fairs.

**Demonstrate** your support for seeking hearing loss treatment by offering financial support. The EPIC survey found that only 19% of teachers are offered hearing insurance – less than three times the amount offered dental and vision insurances.

There is little question about the importance of healthy hearing to promote employee health and well-being, and most view it as integral to their job performance as well. A full 70% of teachers believe moderate hearing loss would impact their productivity at work if it were not treated. Show your understanding and support by providing the tools and encouragement to get the care they need.

**To find out more about hearing health care benefits, visit [www.epichearing.com](http://www.epichearing.com).**

### Did you know?

From **\$.35 to \$1.75 per member per month**, hearing insurance is one of the most affordable benefits available for its value.

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<sup>i</sup> One in five Americans has hearing loss. Johns Hopkins Medicine press release. Issued November 14, 2011. Retrieved January 2, 2014 from [http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/one\\_in\\_five\\_americans\\_has\\_hearing\\_loss](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/one_in_five_americans_has_hearing_loss).

<sup>ii</sup> Kochkin, S. Prevalence of Hearing Loss in the U.S. Better Hearing Institute. Retrieved January 2, 2014 from [http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing\\_loss/prevalence\\_of\\_hearing\\_loss/index.cfm](http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing_loss/prevalence_of_hearing_loss/index.cfm).

<sup>iii</sup> Kochkin, S. Prevalence of Hearing Loss in the U.S. Better Hearing Institute. Retrieved January 2, 2014 from [http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing\\_loss/prevalence\\_of\\_hearing\\_loss/index.cfm](http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing_loss/prevalence_of_hearing_loss/index.cfm).

<sup>iv</sup> Kochkin, S. Prevalence of Hearing Loss in the U.S. Better Hearing Institute. Retrieved January 2, 2014 from [http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing\\_loss/prevalence\\_of\\_hearing\\_loss/index.cfm](http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing_loss/prevalence_of_hearing_loss/index.cfm).

<sup>v</sup> Listen Hear! 2013 Employee and Employer Perceptions of Hearing Loss and Hearing Loss Benefits survey. Employee survey conducted online by Wakefield Research on behalf of EPIC Hearing Healthcare between November 22 and December 13, 2013, among 1,500 nationally representative full-time employed Americans 18+, including oversamples of sub-audiences of up to 101 Hispanics, 110 African-Americans, 100 Asian-Americans, 169 teachers and 100 law enforcement professionals (all employed full-time). Employer survey conducted online by Source Media on behalf of EPIC Hearing Healthcare in December 2013 among 493 benefits professionals.

<sup>vi</sup> Noise Affects Teachers' Well-Being and Health. Hear-it. December 19, 2013. Based on a study conducted by the Danish Centre of Educational Environment (DCUM) published in Working Environment. Retrieved January 15, 2014 from <http://www.political.hear-it.org/Noise-affects-teachers-well-being-and-health-->.