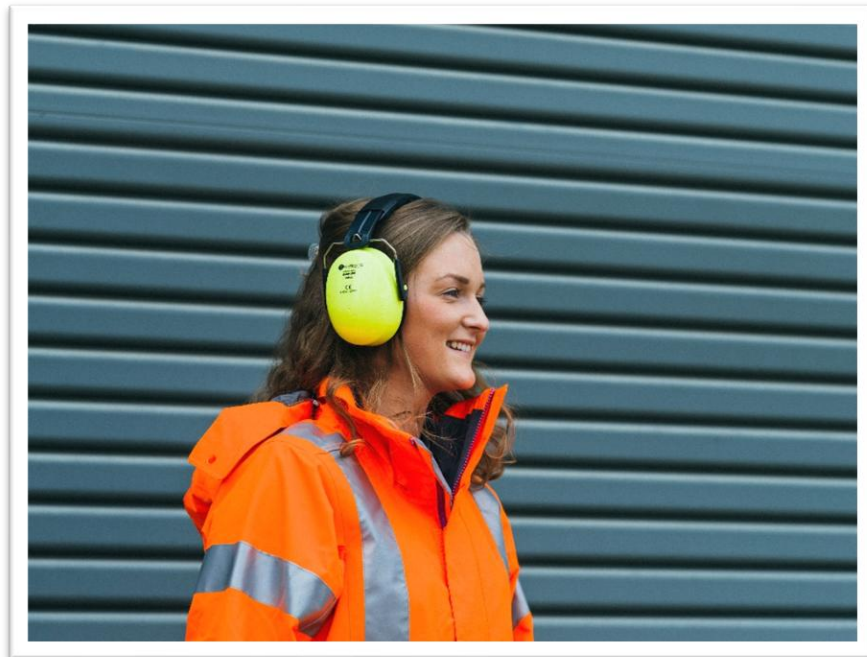




OnSite Support Research Team

Hearing Test Month

RAISING AWARENESS FOR HEARING HEALTH



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This and other White Papers have been developed by the OnSite Support Research Team
in collaboration with leading independent bodies and other partners

**HEARING-LOSS
AWARENESS
MONTH AIMS TO
ENCOURAGE
THOSE
EXPERIENCING
SIGNS OF
HEARING LOSS TO
ACT QUICKLY.**

Research from Boots Hearing has revealed that it takes the average adult ten years to get a hearing test after noticing an issue with their ears. Which is why January is dedicated to hearing-loss awareness month or ‘The Great Big Hearing Test.’”

The Importance of Hearing Health

Hearing is one of our most essential senses, serving as a vital link to the world around us. It facilitates communication, fosters social connections, and allows us to appreciate the nuances of sound. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that approximately 1.5 billion individuals worldwide experience some level of hearing impairment, a figure anticipated to increase as the global population ages.

Despite these alarming statistics, many people remain unaware of their hearing loss until it has advanced considerably. Regular hearing assessments are crucial for the early identification of hearing problems, enabling individuals to seek timely intervention and thereby enhance their overall quality of life.

The Great Big Hearing Test month acts as a crucial reminder to focus on our auditory health, promote awareness regarding hearing loss, and motivate individuals to take proactive measures to safeguard their hearing capabilities.

Noise at work

Excessive noise in the workplace can lead to hearing impairment. This deterioration often occurs gradually, and individuals may only become aware of their hearing loss when the effects of noise exposure are compounded by age-related hearing decline.

As an employer, you have a responsibility to protect employees from noise, particularly if they are using:

- noisy powered tools or machinery
- explosive sources such as cartridge operated tools or detonators,
- noise from impacts such as hammering, drop forging, pneumatic impact tools.

The affects of noise

People often experience temporary deafness after leaving a noisy place. Although hearing recovers within a few hours, this should not be ignored. It is a sign that if they continue to be exposed to the noise, their hearing could be permanently damaged.

The damage is disabling in that it can hinder an individual's ability to comprehend speech, engage in conversations, or utilise a telephone effectively.

Moreover, hearing loss is not the sole concern; individuals may also experience tinnitus, characterized by ringing, whistling, buzzing, or humming sensations in the ears. This distressing condition can disrupt sleep patterns.



Noise at work can interfere with communications and make warnings harder to hear. Additionally, it may impair an individual's situational awareness, leading to potential safety hazards that could result in injury or fatality.

The law

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 is relevant to both employees and employers. It requires employers to take action to prevent or reduce risks to health and safety from noise at work. The Regulations require an employer to:

- Assess risks to employees;
- Take action to reduce the noise exposure causing these risks;
- Provide employees with hearing protection if you cannot reduce the noise exposure enough;
- Ensure the legal limits on noise exposure are not exceeded;
- Provide employees with information, instruction and training;
- Conduct health surveillance where there is a risk identified.

Getting started

1. Assess the risks

Evaluate the potential risks to determine if additional measures are required. The purpose of the risk assessment is to assist you in determining the necessary actions to safeguard the health and safety of employees who are subjected to noise exposure.

2. Eliminate or control noise risks

There are many ways of reducing noise and noise exposure - often a combination of methods works best. Initially, consider the possibility of eliminating the loud noise entirely. If complete removal is unfeasible, take measures to manage the noise at its source, and contemplate redesigning the workplace along with reorganizing work patterns.

3. Hearing protection

Where there remains a risk, issue employees with hearing protection. Make use mandatory for the high-risk cases and manage use with hearing protection zones.

4. Maintain and use noise-control equipment

Employers will need to make sure that hearing protection works effectively and check that:

- it remains in good, clean condition;
- earmuff seals are undamaged;
- the tension of the headbands is not reduced;
- there are no unofficial modifications;
- compressible earplugs are soft, pliable and clean.

5. Worker information and training

Give employees information, instruction and training on the correct fitting and use of hearing protection. This includes:

WHY REGULAR HEARING TESTS ARE ESSENTIAL:

There are numerous reasons why hearing tests should be an integral part of regular health check-ups:

- Early Detection of Hearing Loss
- Improved Communication
- Prevention of Further Damage
- Improvement of Overall Quality of Life



THE PURPOSE OF HEALTH SURVEILLANCE IS TO:

- warn you when employees might be suffering from early signs of hearing damage;
- give you an opportunity to do something to prevent the damage getting worse;
- check that control measures are working.

- the risks and safe working practices
- control measures, hearing protection and health surveillance.

6. Health surveillance

Provide health surveillance (including hearing checks) for those at risk.

Health surveillance for hearing impairment typically involves the following:

- conducting regular hearing assessments in controlled environments;
- informing employees about the outcomes of their hearing evaluations;
- maintaining health records;
- ensuring that employees receive medical examinations if hearing impairment is detected.

Ideally, health surveillance should commence prior to exposure to noise, particularly for new employees or those transitioning to different roles, to establish a baseline. However, it can also be implemented at any point for employees already subjected to noise exposure, followed by a consistent schedule of assessments. These hearing evaluations must be performed by individuals with the requisite training. As the employer, you bear the responsibility for ensuring that health surveillance is executed effectively.

Many companies may have access to in-house occupational health services who may be able to conduct the health surveillance for employee. Where there are no facilities, in-house companies can use an external contractor.

It is important that employees understand that the aim of health surveillance is to protect their hearing. You will need their understanding and co-operation if health surveillance is to be effective. Use the results to review controls and further protect individuals.

7. Review

Monitor the workplace for changes that affect noise exposures. Monitor grouped health surveillance results to identify where controls are failing and look out for new ways to reduce risks!

The Great Big Hearing Test Month encourages people to take care of one of their most vital senses.

By raising awareness about the importance of hearing health, employers can ensure that more people get their hearing tested, understand the risks, and take steps to prevent further damage.

If you don't already have a health surveillance program that includes hearing testing in place, consider setting it up during Hearing Test Month. It's a small step that can have a big impact on employees' overall health and quality of life.

