Key Findings Regarding Hearing Loss in the United States
WHO-ITU Consultation on Making Listening Safe Initiative
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Introduction: The 2016 National Academies of Sciences report “Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability” included a call to action for government agencies to strengthen efforts to collect, analyze, and disseminate population-based data on hearing loss in adults.

Methods: CDC analyzed the most recent available data collected both by questionnaire and audiometric tests of adult participants aged 20–69 years in the 2011–2012 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) to determine the presence of audiometric notches indicative of noise-induced hearing loss. 3500 audiograms were analyzed. Prevalence of both unilateral and bilateral audiometric notches and their association with sociodemographics and self-reported exposure to loud noise were calculated.

Results: Nearly one in four adults (24%) had audiometric notches, suggesting a high prevalence of noise-induced hearing loss. The prevalence of notches was higher among males. Almost one in four U.S. adults who reported excellent or good hearing had audiometric notches (5.5% bilateral and 18.0% unilateral). Among participants who reported exposure to loud noise at work, almost one third had a notch.

Conclusions and Implications for Public Health Practice: Noise-induced hearing loss is a significant, often unrecognized health problem among U.S. adults. Discussions between patients and personal health care providers about hearing loss symptoms, tests, and ways to protect hearing might help with early diagnosis of hearing loss and provide opportunities to prevent harmful noise exposures. Avoiding prolonged exposure to loud environments and using personal hearing protection devices can prevent noise-induced hearing loss.

Key Points

- About 53 percent of adults with noise-induced hearing damage reported no job exposure to loud sounds. This damage—shown by a distinctive drop in the ability to hear high-pitched sounds—appeared as early as age 20.
- Almost one in four adults ages 20 to 69 who reported good to excellent hearing already have some hearing loss.
- Almost 1 in 5 adults who reported no job exposure to noise showed hearing damage indicative of noise exposure.
- The presence of hearing loss increased with age, from about 1 in 5 (19%) among young adults ages 20-29 to more than 1 in 4 (27%) among adults ages 50-59.
- Hearing loss is more common among men and people over the age of 40 years.