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AAP News

Listen up: Excessive noise is a public health issue

by Carla Kemp, Senior Editor

Editor's note: *The 2019 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Oct. 25-29 in New Orleans.*

Like many of us, Sophie J. Balk, M.D., FAAP, has attended social events such as weddings where the music is painfully loud.

"These situations started me thinking that noise exposure is an unrecognized health hazard that many people accept as a given," said Dr. Balk, a member of the AAP Council on Environmental Health Executive Committee. "Most people do not see excessive noise as a public health issue to be acknowledged and that solutions are possible."

Yet statistics bear out the extent of the problem, even among children.

Approximately 5.2 million children and adolescents ages 6-19 years (about 12.5%) have permanent damage to their hearing from excessive noise exposure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dr. Balk plans to discuss sources of excessive noise, their negative consequences and what pediatricians can do to combat the problem during a session titled "Turn It Down! Sounding the Alarm on Effects of Noise Exposure in Infants, Children, and Teens" (F2193) from 3-3:45 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 26 in room 352 of the convention center.

Excessive noise exposure can begin right after birth when newborns, especially those in the neonatal intensive care unit, are subjected to the sound of phones, ventilators, infusion pumps, monitors, incubators, alarms and air conditioning, Dr. Balk explained. The situation may not get any better for infants exposed to noisy sleep machines, toddlers who have loud toys and older children and teens who turn up the volume on music and videos.

Hearing loss is not the only consequence of too much racket. It also can trigger a physiologic stress response and interfere with sleep and conversation. And like other forms of pollution, noise can affect children more than adults.

"Infants and children may be more vulnerable to noise because of effects on their developing cognition and less control over their environments," said Dr. Balk, attending pediatrician at Children's Hospital at Montefiore and professor of pediatrics at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York.

Dr. Balk will discuss the many ways in which pediatricians can address the problem, from educating families to advocating for noise-control regulations.

"It is important for families to know that once hearing is lost due to noise, it will not return," she said. "It is important for everyone to take care of their hearing throughout a lifetime."

For more coverage of the 2019 AAP National Conference & Exhibition, visit <http://bit.ly/AAPNationalConference19>.