

Teen musicians encouraged to use earplugs as music gets louder

By Chicago Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.08.15

Word Count **726**

Level **970L**



(Right) Sophia Pellar, 16, plays the flute during a varsity wind ensemble practice at New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois, April 9, 2015. She wears special ear plugs to help prevent the ear pain she often experiences when playing with the pep band. Chris Sweda/Chicago Tribune/TNS

CHICAGO, Ill. — Sophia Pellar plays the flute in her New Trier High School pep band. The noise from the band used to hurt her ears. The pain ended after an ear doctor gave her some special earplugs.

The earplugs are designed to protect musicians from hearing loss. Still, Sophia giggles nervously when she explains that the earplugs have yet to become part of her regular routine.

Sophia, who is 16, said pep band can be "crazy loud." She wears the earplugs then. "But the thought of wearing them every day is a little embarrassing," she said.

Parents Are Usually Unaware

Research indicates that as many as 1 in 5 teens suffers from hearing loss. Much of that hearing loss is caused by noise damage. More doctors and school band directors are urging kids to protect their

hearing. In some cases, they provide earplugs. Yet experts say their messages are not working as well as they can. The reason is students think it is "uncool" to wear earplugs. The same thinking once kept people from using bike helmets, shin guards and sunscreen.

The music educators now being trained at colleges and universities are learning about the problem. They are told that they should teach the importance of students protecting their hearing during rehearsals and performances. Still, officials say that parents typically are unaware that their children need to protect their ears.

The Music Gets Louder

Sophia's mother is Chimene Pellar. She became alarmed recently when she learned that Sophia is often in pain after playing her flute in tight space with her fellow musicians.

"I had never thought of it at all ... and she has been playing the flute since she was in fourth grade," said Pellar, a doctor. "I also have concerns when I walk by my kids when they have their earbuds in and I can still hear their music. And the longer they listen, the louder it seems to get."

Medical professionals who study teen hearing loss say loud music from instruments, concerts and earbuds can harm the hair cells inside the ear. The result is hearing damage that builds up over time. The damage cannot be reversed.

More teenagers have hearing loss, said Dr. Henry Ou. The increase "is not a surprise when you look at our society, which has gotten busier, noisier and overstimulated," Ou said. He studies ear, nose and throat medicine at Seattle Children's Hospital.

"Sound is just energy," Ou said, and when it is too loud, sound "can cause damage."

An Uncomfortable Ear Needs Earplugs

The National Association for Music Education has a message for teachers and band directors. The group wants them to address the dangers of noise-induced hearing loss. They suggest, for example, making sure that students are not performing at high volume levels for a long time.

Music teachers and band directors can encourage behavior, Michael Butera, who runs the association, said. But teachers cannot force students to wear earplugs, he said.

At Barrington High School, band director Randy Karon said he often talks to his students about the need to protect their hearing. They need to do this both during practice and performances and outside of the band program, too, Karon said.

"My general rule is, if your ear feels uncomfortable at any time, put a pair of earplugs in," Karon said. He even keeps a large jar in the band room stocked with foam earplugs for his students.

Karon said he also is increasingly aware of the need to protect his own hearing.

"Music is my livelihood, and if I can't hear, I'm in trouble," he said.

Drummers Already Use Them

At New Trier, band director Matt Temple's music program is one of 400 nationwide participating in Etymotic Research's Adopt-a-Band program. The program pairs schools with local ear doctors.

The doctors give earplugs to students.

Etymotic is a company that manufactures earplugs. The company sells new earplugs that it says are smaller and less obvious. They made these because some people did not want to be seen wearing earplugs.

Temple said it was not clear if his musicians will wear their new earplugs beyond pep band season.

He said a lot of the drummers and percussion members "already have form-fitted earplugs, and they wear them a lot." However, Temple added that many teenagers think they cannot be hurt.

Quiz

1 In which section of the article does the author highlight a program designed to prevent hearing loss in students?

- (A) "Parents Are Usually Unaware"
- (B) "The Music Gets Louder"
- (C) "An Uncomfortable Ear Needs Earplugs"
- (D) "Drummers Already Use Them"

2 The author shows that many people are unaware of the danger of hearing loss in each of the following ways EXCEPT:

- (A) comparing hearing loss to other issues
- (B) making a prediction about hearing loss
- (C) highlighting a doctor's surprise at her daughter's hearing problem
- (D) citing a statistic about hearing loss

3 Read the first paragraph of the section "Parents Are Usually Unaware."

Research indicates that as many as 1 in 5 teens suffers from hearing loss. Much of that hearing loss is caused by noise damage. More doctors and school band directors are urging kids to protect their hearing. In some cases, they provide earplugs. Yet experts say their messages are not working as well as they can. The reason is students think it is "uncool" to wear earplugs. The same thinking once kept people from using bike helmets, shin guards and sunscreen.

What role does the paragraph play in the article as a whole?

- (A) summarizing the article as a whole
- (B) showing the extent of a problem
- (C) explaining the solution to a problem
- (D) comparing two different groups

4 Read the introductory paragraph of the article.

Sophia Pellar plays the flute in her New Trier High School pep band. The noise from the band used to hurt her ears. The pain ended after an ear doctor gave her some special earplugs.

Fill in the blank. The author introduces the article by

- (A) giving an example.
- (B) summarizing the article.
- (C) explaining a problem.
- (D) comparing two people.