



This factsheet has been prepared for general information purposes. It is not a legal document. Please refer to the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Rehabilitation Services and Claims Manual, Volumes I and II* for purposes of interpretation and application of the law.

Factsheet #22
Updated: January 2013

HEARING DISORDERS

Please read the Factsheet called *Introduction to Occupational Diseases* for basic information about workers' compensation for occupational diseases.

What kinds of hearing loss are covered by workers' compensation?

WorkSafeBC accepts two kinds of hearing loss: those caused by traumatic injury and those caused by general exposure to workplace noise.

You can claim workers' compensation for either kind of hearing loss, as long as it is caused by an injury or exposure to noise at work. WorkSafeBC deals with these two types of hearing loss in different ways. They are explained below.

TRAUMATIC INJURY

How does WorkSafeBC decide claims for hearing loss due to injury?

If you have an accident (traumatic injury) and you have hearing loss from it, WorkSafeBC decides the claim in the same way as for any injury at work. You can get:

- wage loss benefits (temporary total and/or partial disability);
- health care benefits, including a hearing aid;
- vocational rehabilitation assistance (including possible worksite modification or assistance in getting a new job, if required); and/or
- a permanent disability pension.

How much compensation will I receive for traumatic hearing loss?

If you are temporarily unable to work, WorkSafeBC will decide on temporary wage loss benefits in the same way as for any other injury at work. Please read the Factsheet called *Wage Loss Benefits*.

For more information:
Website: www.labour.gov.bc.ca/wab



Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley/Kootenays: 1-800-663-4261
Northern & Central Interior: 1-800-663-6695
Vancouver Island: 1-800-661-4066

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If you have permanent hearing loss, WorkSafeBC will give you a permanent disability award. The award is based on the WorkSafeBC *Permanent Disability Evaluation Schedule*. The maximum award, for total traumatic hearing loss – greater than 80 decibels (dB) in both ears – is 30 per cent of total disability. Partial losses of hearing in one or both ears give rise to lesser awards.

GRADUAL EXPOSURE TO NOISE (NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS)

How does WorkSafeBC decide claims for hearing loss due to noise exposure?

In order for WorkSafeBC to accept your claim for noise-induced hearing loss:

- you must have a medical diagnosis of hearing loss due to noise (sensori-neural); **and**
- your work must have involved a continuous work exposure to noise levels averaging above 85 dBA (noise in decibels) for 8 or more hours per day for at least two years; **and**
- there must be no evidence that your hearing loss relates to causes other than your work.

If you have hearing loss due to noise levels lower than the required 85 dBA, your claim may be accepted if you can provide evidence that the noise exposure at work caused your hearing loss due to your vulnerability to hearing loss.

WorkSafeBC does not generally compensate for any hearing loss that occurs after the exposure to noise at work has ended.

What if my hearing loss is partly due to other causes?

If WorkSafeBC decides that your hearing loss is partly due to other causes, the amount of hearing loss from other causes is subtracted from your total hearing loss. You will receive compensation only for the amount of hearing loss related to your work. If you are retired and the age of 63 years at the time of the commencement of the hearing loss permanent disability award, payments are made until you reach the age of 65. If you are retired and 63 years or older at the time of the commencement of the award, payments are made for two years following such date (see Factsheet 'Duration of Benefits after 2002').

However, hearing loss which dates back to your noise exposure at work, but which was only discovered or assessed at a later date, will still be compensable. If you are no longer working when your hearing loss is assessed, your Permanent Disability Award will be based on your earnings in the most recent employment in which you were engaged. If WorkSafeBC believes that part of your hearing loss relates to causes outside of your work and if your hearing loss seems too great for the noise exposure you had at work, WorkSafeBC will use a table to decide the percentage of disability that relates to your work. The table estimates the average

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hearing loss expected from a given exposure to noise in the workplace. WorkSafeBC will generally pay benefits according to the proportion of your hearing loss caused by your work.

How much compensation will I receive for hearing loss?

WorkSafeBC does **not** normally pay wage loss benefits for noise-induced hearing loss. You can receive other benefits such as hearing aids, vocational rehabilitation, and a **permanent disability award**.

The amount of disability award you receive depends on the amount of your hearing loss. However, the maximum award you can get for hearing loss due to noise exposure is less than for hearing loss due to traumatic injury.

The highest disability award you can get for complete gradual loss of hearing in both ears **due to noise exposure** is 15 percent of total disability. For complete loss of hearing in one ear only you will get an award of 3 percent of total disability.

The award is paid according to **Schedule D** of the *Workers Compensation Act*.

SCHEDULE D		
Non-Traumatic Hearing Loss (Exposure to Noise)		
Percentage of Total Disability		
Loss of Hearing in Decibels	Ear Most Affected	Ear Least Affected
0 - 27 dB	0%	0%
28 - 32	0.3	1.2
33 - 37	0.5	2.0
38 - 42	0.7	2.8
43 - 47	1.0	4.0
48 - 52	1.3	5.2
53 - 57	1.7	6.8
58 - 62	2.1	8.4
63 - 67	2.6	10.4
68 or more	3.0	12.0

For hearing loss in one ear only you will receive a smaller disability award. If you have hearing loss in both ears, the disability for each ear is established separately and then added together. The percentage of disability is higher for the ear that is the "least affected" (in other words, the ear that hears better). That is because hearing loss in both ears is considered much more of a disability than hearing loss in one ear.

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For example:

A loss of 28 dB (decibels) in both ears would result in an award of 1.5 percent of total disability (0.3 percent plus 1.2 percent).

A loss of 40 dB in one ear, and 35 dB in the other ear would result in 0.7 percent disability for the ear most affected (40 dB) and 2.0 percent disability for the ear least affected (35 dB), for a combined award of 2.7 percent of total disability.

TINNITUS

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is ringing in the ear that is continuous or persistent. WorkSafeBC may accept tinnitus if it results from a work injury or occupational noise.

Can I get workers' compensation for tinnitus?

WorkSafeBC policy does not normally allow compensation for tinnitus by itself. However, if you have tinnitus with a hearing loss of a least 28 dB in one ear, WorkSafeBC may provide compensation if the tinnitus impairs your ability to work.

What if I disagree with a decision?

If you do not agree with WorkSafeBC's decision, you have the right to request a review. You must request a review within **90 days**. If you disagree with the Review Division decision you have **30 days** to file an appeal to the Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal.