***NEWS*  Contact:** Vicki Bendure

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 540-687-3360 o/ 202-374-9259 c

 Vicki@Bendurepr.com

**The Sight & Hearing Association Releases its Annual Noisy Toys List as the American Academy of Audiology Cautions Parents on Toy Selection this Holiday Season**

**RESTON,** **Va., Dec. 3, 2019—**Just as the Sight & Hearing Association releases its annual Noisy Toys List for 2019, the American Academy of Audiology is urging parents to be cautious when selecting toys. Recognizing that tiny ears are particularly susceptible to hearing damage, it is important to check noise levels before purchasing them. “Many parents don’t realize the permanent damage a simple toy can inflict on a child’s hearing,” said Catherine Palmer, Ph.D., president of the American Academy of Audiology; associate professor, University of Pittsburgh and director of Audiology for the UPMC Health System. “When we fail to protect a child’s hearing, the result can be irreversible hearing loss.” The inner ear contains delicate hair cells which do not regrow. Once these are damaged by noise, the result is permanent hearing loss.

The Sight & Hearing Association, headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota has produced an [annual list on noisy toys](http://www.sightandhearing.org/Services/NoisyToysList%C2%A9.aspx) prior to the holidays for the past 22 years. Since 1939, SHA has been identifying and preventing vision and hearing loss, in partnership with other professional and community organizations, by providing screenings, education and research. "During the holiday season, we look for the most popular sound-producing toys on the market and, with a sound level meter, we measure the decibel level to raise awareness regarding how dangerously loud and potentially damaging toys can be to children. Toys are tested based on how a child would play with them, first at arm's length (10 inches) and then next to the ear, which is how a child often listens to a noisy toy", explained Kathy Webb, executive director of SHA.

“It’s very important that parents pay attention to this list as well as any toy they purchase. Hearing damage can be from a one-time exposure or cumulative exposures,” said Craig Kasper, Au.D., a member of the American Academy of Audiology and an audiologist and managing director at NYHD | Institute for Hearing & Balance in Manhattan. Kasper has more than 20 years of experience in the field of noise-induced hearing loss.

“It’s important to note that the 85-decibel level threshold that the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommends is for people with long exposure to the sound for eight hours or more,” Kasper stated. “Having said that, parents and anyone buying toys for children need to be aware of loud noises, particularly toys that have loud bursts—cap guns, popping balloons, air horns, etc.”

[A study released in January 2017 by researchers with the University of Alberta](http://www.canadianaudiologist.ca/issue/volume-3-issue-6-2016/column/science-matters/) in Canada, determined the noise levels of popping balloons. They studied popping them with a pin, blowing them up until they ruptured and crushing them until they burst. The ruptured balloons clocked in at 168 decibels, four decibels louder than a 12-gauge shotgun.

Palmer and Kasper both advise patients to use phone apps to test the sound levels of toys before buying them. Toys that make noise at or above 85 dBA can contribute to noise-induced hearing loss over time. If they come in at 85 decibels or higher when holding your phone microphone near them, like your child would hold the toy near their own ear, don’t buy them. It isn’t worth the risk,” said Palmer. Remember, the louder the sound, the faster the damage and damage continues with exposure.

While hearing loss numbers are rising in adults in the U.S., the total number of children with some type of hearing loss is unknown and many cases go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed.

“A child with just minimal hearing loss can be missing 50 percent of classroom discussion,” Palmer explained. These children will need to use extra effort in order to hear what is being said and they often become distracted and exhausted by the end of the day. These characteristics can be mistaken for learning disabilities when what the child needs is management of the hearing loss, typically in the form of hearing aids and other assistive listening devices.

Lack of hearing can lead to behavioral issues, lack of focus, even depression in children. Children with hearing loss often don’t recognize that they can’t hear and parents don’t always know the signs.

“Loud toys aren’t just annoying to parents, they can be a danger to children,” added Kasper. “Parents should exercise caution when buying toys with sound, including video games. With toys and games where you can turn the sound down, set the sound at an acceptable, non-harmful level and teach children to keep them at that level. Also, be vigilant about any signs that may indicate your child is having difficulty with their hearing.” If you are concerned about your child’s hearing, it is worth having a comprehensive hearing test.

# The American Academy of Audiology provides a list of licensed audiologists on its website: [www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org). Click on “Find an Audiologist.”

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**About the American Academy of Audiology**

The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. Representing the interests of approximately 14,000 audiologists nationwide, the Academy is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to [www.howsyourhearing.org](http://www.howsyourhearing.org).

**About the Sight & Hearing Association**

Founded in 1939 as the Minnesota Society for the Prevention of Blindness, the Sight & Hearing Association, a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization, added the preservation of hearing to its mission in 1979. For the past 80 years, the SHA has been identifying and preventing vision and hearing loss, in partnership with other professional and community organizations, by providing screenings, education and research. Each year, over 6,000 children from birth through high school and over 5,000 adults receive vision and hearing screening from SHA. Unlike most health organizations, SHA is completely mobile. SHA health screening staff can be found at metro area Head Start locations, charter, public and private schools throughout Minnesota, childcare centers, family daycare homes, community centers, senior living communities and at corporate health eventsFor more information, visit [www.sightandhearing.org](http://www.sightandhearing.org).