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Dear Parents:

Since May is Better Hearing and Speech Month (BHSM), I wanted to remind you about the dangers of noise abuse and how to protect your hearing—and the hearing of your children. Loud volumes associated with portable listening systems such as iPods and CD players, rock concerts, indoor sports events, and video arcades are prevalent throughout our society. Over 10 million Americans have hearing loss because of excess noise exposure. A Zogby International poll indicated that Americans listen to personal audio technology too loudly for too long, and the CDC reported that over 5 million youths exhibit some degree of hearing loss due to exposure to noise at hazardous levels. With the increasing popularity of personal audio technology, millions of adults and children across the United States are at greater risk of noise-induced hearing loss than ever before. It is important to teach your children to know when loud is too loud. Remind your children that it is too loud if:

- You must raise your voice to be heard;
- You have difficulty understanding someone who is an arm's length away;
- You have pain, ringing, or buzzing in your ears after exposure to loud sounds; or
- Speech sounds muffled or dull after noise exposure.

Below are some quick and easy guidelines you can follow to help protect your family's hearing:

- Be very cautious in allowing your preschooler to use any personal listening device with headsets or any form of earbuds. Before buying any sound-making toy for an infant or toddler, hold it up to your ear. If the sound causes your ear to feel uncomfortable (ringing, buzzing, or muffled speech), either immediately or after a short exposure, then the sound is too loud and the toy should not be purchased. Follow the same rule for toys already in the home and either remove the batteries or discard the toy.
- If you and your children attend rock concerts, do lawn work for extra spending money or to help around the house, or attend indoor professional sports events, please get into the habit of using ear plugs (cotton balls will not protect you). Inexpensive ear plugs that you buy at the pharmacy can reduce the sound by approximately 15–30 decibels and can bring the noise level within a safe hearing range without affecting the ability to enjoy an event.
- When planning a large party where there may be a DJ or live band, tell the performers to limit their sound output to 85 decibels.

- Have the children turn down the volume on their Wii, Nintendo DS, and Guitar Hero games.
- If your children are learning to play the drums, electric guitar, or practice target shooting, have custom earplugs made for them to use when they are practicing or performing.
- If you have school-aged children who like to listen to music using a iPod, Discman, or a CD player, use the parental controls, if available, to set the volume at a low level.
- Finally, in terms of general hearing health care, make sure that you do not use Q-tips to clean out wax from the ear canal. Remind your children to keep tiny items (beads, Lego pieces, etc.) away from their ears.

I hope this information will be helpful to you and your family. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

*This letter was developed with ASHA member, Frances Santore.*