

Hearing loss

You've been diagnosed with hearing loss and may have some questions about whether or not your condition is related to your job duties.

Causes of hearing loss

There are many causes of hearing loss:

- **Age-related** – most people eventually lose their ability to hear as they age. This condition is known as presbycusis.
- **Brain dysfunction** – brain tumours or multiple sclerosis can lead to hearing loss.
- **Disease** – certain diseases can result in hearing loss. For example, Ménière's Disease, a disorder of the inner ear that can affect hearing and balance, often results in hearing loss.
- **Exposure to excessive noise** – referred to as noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL). Exposure to excessive noise, including recreational exposures such as loud music, can result in gradual hearing loss.
- **Hereditary or genetic** – there are some genetic conditions that can lead to hearing loss. For example, otosclerosis, an abnormal bone growth in the middle ear, may be considered to be hereditary.
- **Infection** – measles, mumps, scarlet fever, or meningitis can lead to hearing loss.
- **Medications or chemical exposure** – use of certain medications (e.g. antibiotics) or exposure to chemicals such as solvents may cause damage to the inner ear. This type of hearing loss is referred to as ototoxicity.
- **Trauma** – injuries to the face and head such as a skull fracture or a ruptured ear drum may cause hearing loss.

Measuring hearing loss

A hearing test determines what you can and cannot hear. This test is called an audiogram and is a standard way of measuring hearing loss. Hearing loss is often categorized as mild, moderate, severe or profound and is measured in units called decibels (dB).

Mild	(between 26 and 40 dB loss)
Moderate	(between 41 and 55 dB loss)
Moderately severe	(between 56 and 70 dB loss)
Severe	(between 71 and 90 dB loss)
Profound	(91 dB or greater loss)

Is my hearing loss the result of my work duties?

A claim for hearing loss may be accepted by WCB when it is the result of a work injury or the result of exposure to noise or toxins in the workplace.

Examples of work-related hearing loss include:

- Traumatic hearing loss resulting from a sudden and specific incident (e.g. a fracture at the base of the skull, or an episode of extreme sound) in the workplace.
- Exposure to certain toxins or chemicals, medications or medical conditions resulting in hearing loss when occurring within the work place.
- The gradual loss of hearing due to prolonged exposure to excessive noise levels in the workplace (referred to as occupational noise-induced hearing loss).

In order for a claim for occupational noise induced hearing loss to be considered by WCB, the following criteria must be met:

- There is a clear history of prolonged occupational noise exposure in excess of the Occupational Exposure Limit while the worker was working in Alberta, or the worker was entitled to coverage under WCB-Alberta while working at a job site outside Alberta, and
- The pattern of hearing loss shown on the audiogram is consistent with occupational noise induced hearing loss.

In Alberta, the occupational exposure limit (OEL) for noise is 85 decibels averaged over an eight-hour day. Workers who are exposed to noise levels higher than 85 decibels should limit their time in that environment so that the overall average noise exposure, in an eight-hour day, does not exceed 85 decibels.

My doctor advised me I have tinnitus – did this happen because of my job duties?

Tinnitus is the perception of sound in a person's ear in the absence of an external sound source. It is often described as a ringing, rushing, buzzing or blowing sound in one or both ears. Tinnitus can be occasional or it can be continuous. It cannot be measured objectively.

To establish a claim for tinnitus there must be:

- An acceptable WCB claim for hearing loss in at least one ear.
- A documented history of two or more years of continuous tinnitus.

Your audiologist can help you.

If you are uncertain whether you have an acceptable claim, your audiologist is a good source of information. He/she can review your audiogram pattern and work history with you and advise you on the application process.

If your hearing loss is not typical of noise-induced hearing loss to aging, your audiologist may recommend that you follow up with an ear, nose and throat specialist.

How to start the application process.

Review the hearing loss application package located on our [website](#). Complete all sections and submit your completed forms along with copies of all audiograms (past and current) to WCB. Instructions on how to submit your application are included in the application package.

Once received, your application will be reviewed by a hearing loss adjudicator to determine if your hearing loss has been caused by occupational noise exposure while working in Alberta.

