



# AUDIOMETRIC TESTING

**If your business requires workers to frequently use hearing protection as a control measure for noise that exceeds the exposure standard, you must provide hearing tests for workers. The person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) must organise and pay for the hearing test.**

For new workers, a baseline hearing test must be completed within three months of commencing their employment. The worker must then get a follow-up monitoring hearing test at least every two years during their employment.

More frequent hearing tests may be required for workers exposed to high, average noise levels throughout their work shift, (e.g.,  $\geq 100\text{dB(A)}$ ).

## Making an appointment

The PCBU can make a hearing test appointment at any audiology clinic in their local area. For help finding an audiology clinic in your area, contact Audiology Australia by calling (03) 9940 3900 or visiting the website.

A doctor's referral is not required when making an appointment for a hearing test. Workers should be referred to a doctor if they experience permanent threshold shifts in their hearing. A doctor can help to determine the cause of hearing loss and potential treatment options.

Find information about business responsibilities after a hearing test below.

## What is a hearing test (audiometry)

Hearing tests are a painless, non-invasive test that measures a person's ability to hear sound. The most common hearing test is pure tone audiometry which measures the softest sound a person can hear across a range of different frequencies.

The worker responds to each frequency by pressing a button. The softest volume the worker hears across the range of frequencies determines the worker's hearing threshold.

A baseline (reference) hearing test establishes a worker's true hearing status before starting their employment. Baseline hearing tests should be completed before workers are exposed to hazardous noise at the workplace.

A monitoring hearing test must be completed at least every two years during the workers employment. Results are compared to the workers baseline test to assess any change in the degree of hearing. Monitoring hearing tests should be performed a few hours into the workers shift to identify the presence of temporary threshold shifts in workers hearing.

## Who performs a hearing test

A hearing test must be performed by a competent person (e.g., audiologist) having acquired the necessary level of training and experience to perform the test, interpret the results and present them in a manner that enables persons at the workplace to make appropriate decisions. Hearing tests must be conducted using the procedures outlined in AS/NZS 1269.4:2014 – Occupational Noise Management – Part 4: Auditory assessment.





## What to expect during a hearing test

There are no special requirements for workers when preparing for a hearing test. If performing a hearing test for the first time, the audiologist will ask a series of questions to identify a person's history with noise exposure during their employment and personal lives.

An ear examination will be performed before the hearing test, using an otoscope to check for any physical damage or obstructions (e.g., ear wax) within the ear that may affect the hearing test.

## Hearing test results

Results are given to workers immediately after the hearing test, including an explanation of what the results mean. Subtle improvements or deterioration may be experienced when performing monitoring hearing tests during the workers employment. These shifts may not have any clinical significance.

Threshold shifts that do have clinical significance are called significant threshold shifts as they can mean a temporary or permanent loss in hearing.

A temporary threshold shift is a short-term shift in a worker's hearing threshold. These usually occur due to exposure to loud noise and will gradually recover when the affected person spends time in a quiet place.

Where a temporary threshold shift has been identified, a re-test must be completed on another day, after 16 hours in quiet conditions to determine if the threshold shift is permanent.

A permanent threshold shift is a permanent shift in a worker's hearing threshold resulting in hearing loss. Permanent hearing loss may occur suddenly or develop over time. Workers should be referred to a physician to diagnose the cause of hearing loss and possible treatment options.

## Business responsibilities after a hearing test

### Record keeping

The PCBU must ensure that all hearing test reports, including any updated baseline hearing tests, are kept as confidential documents. Employees should get a copy of their hearing test reports when their employment ends.

### If a threshold shift or tinnitus is reported

When a significant permanent threshold shift is detected, or a diagnosis of tinnitus, the PCBU must review noise control measures at the workplace to ensure they remain effective in reducing the risk of further hearing impairment. Actions may include:

- ▶ review worker tasks to identify changes that may have caused an increase in noise exposure
- ▶ ensure higher order controls, e.g., isolation, engineering, are used where reasonably practicable to minimise worker exposure to noise
- ▶ substitute ototoxic chemicals for less hazardous chemicals or review workplace controls to ensure they remain effective in eliminating the risk of inhalation, absorption, and ingestion
- ▶ ensure hearing protectors worn by workers are adequate for the level of noise exposure
- ▶ retrain workers to ensure hearing protectors are fitted and worn correctly
- ▶ ensure workers wear hearing protection consistently throughout their work shift.





If a worker's hearing loss interferes with the safe performance of their work, the PCBU should ensure that all reasonably practicable steps are taken to modify the work environment, including:

- ▶ volume control on equipment such as telephones
- ▶ acoustically treated meeting areas with low noise and low sound reflections
- ▶ supplementary visual warning signals, or
- ▶ alternative work for the worker if other measures do not remedy the situation.

For further guidance call SafeWork SA on 1300 365 255.

