

**POLICY NUMBER: POL-09**

---

**Chapter:**  
**CLAIMS**

**Subject:**  
**HEARING LOSS**

**Effective Date:**  
**April 28, 1994**

**Last Updated:**  
**September 12, 2016**

---

**PURPOSE STATEMENT:**

The purpose of this policy is to describe how the Workers Compensation Board determines whether hearing loss is compensable and a worker's entitlement to benefits related to hearing loss.

---

**REFERENCE:**

*Occupational Health And Safety Act R.S.P.E.I. 1988, Cap. 0-1.1, General Regulations, Sec 8.3.*  
*Workers Compensation Act R.S.P.E.I. 1988, Cap. W-7.1, Sections 1, 6(10), 18.*  
Workers Compensation Board Policy, POL-61, Pre-Existing Conditions.  
Workers Compensation Board Policy, POL-64, Health Care Providers.  
Workers Compensation Board Policy, POL-89, Impairment.  
Workers Compensation Board Policy, POL-92, Medical Aid.

---

**DEFINITION:**

In this policy:

"Impairment" means a medically measurable permanent anatomical loss or disfigurement and includes: amputation, loss of vision, loss of hearing, impaired nerve function, scarring causing disfigurement, joint ankylosis, or joint fusion from surgery.

---

**POLICY:**

1. Hearing loss is determined by averaging the loss of hearing at four audio frequencies (500, 1000, 2000, and 3000 Hz), as identified in an audiogram. The audiogram must be performed by a health care provider authorized by the Workers Compensation Board to provide this service, as outlined in Workers Compensation Board policy, POL-64, "Health Care Providers."
2. A worker who had an established hearing loss prior to commencing employment will be compensated only for increased hearing loss caused by occupational exposure to excessive noise levels pursuant to Workers Compensation Board policy POL-61, "Pre-Existing Conditions."

**Traumatic Hearing Loss**

3. Traumatic hearing loss is sudden or acute and traceable to a specific incident such as a single exposure to a sudden burst of sound (an explosion) or a sudden blow to the head. Traumatic hearing loss may also be caused by chemicals or other materials entering the ear.
4. The date of accident for traumatic hearing loss is the date of the incident.

**Noise Induced Hearing Loss**

5. Noise induced hearing loss is gradual and results from prolonged occupational exposure of excessive noise levels over a period of years. In determining entitlement for noise induced hearing loss the Workers Compensation Board will consider the following:
  - a) There is a history of occupational exposure to noise levels in excess of the acceptable noise exposure levels outlined in the *Occupational Health And Safety Act* General Regulations. Where there is no record of measured noise levels at the workplace, the Workers Compensation Board may estimate the expected noise levels based on the type of work being performed.
  - b) Noise induced hearing loss does not progress after the worker is removed from the noise exposure. Audiogram test results that were taken closest to the date the worker was last exposed to the excessive workplace noise are the best representation of the worker's noise induced hearing loss related to work.

**POLICY NUMBER: POL-09**

---

- c) The principal characteristics of noise induced hearing loss (for example, it is usually bilateral and has a symmetrical pattern).
- d) The worker's medical history.

To assist in gathering the above information, the worker must complete the Workers Compensation Board's Hearing Loss Questionnaire.

- 6. Where the worker is no longer exposed to excessive workplace noise, the worker must have an audiogram, which shows a noise induced hearing loss, performed within 5 years of leaving the workplace location, with the excessive noise, to be considered for noise induced hearing loss.
- 7. Section 6 of this policy will become effective June 1, 2014. Claims for noise induced hearing loss that are received by the Workers Compensation Board prior to that date will be adjudicated with no requirement for an audiogram to have been conducted within 5 years of leaving the workplace location with the excessive noise.
- 8. Where the hearing loss is due in part to the employment of the worker and in part to a cause other than the employment, the occupational noise exposure must be the dominant cause to be compensable.
- 9. The date of accident for noise induced hearing loss, is outlined in Workers Compensation Board policy, POL-90, "Time Frame Limitations for Claims Filing and Invoicing."

**Impairment**

- 10. To be considered for an impairment rating for unilateral (monaural) hearing loss, the average hearing loss at the four audio frequencies must be greater than 25 decibels (dB) in one ear.
- 11. To be considered for an impairment rating for bilateral (binaural) hearing loss the average hearing loss at the four audio frequencies must be greater than 25 decibels (dB) in both ears.
- 12. An impairment award, based on the impairment rating, for hearing loss will be calculated as outlined in Workers Compensation Board policy POL-89, "Impairment".

### **Hearing Aids and Supplies**

13. Where the Workers Compensation Board determines the worker has an average hearing loss at the four frequencies greater than 25 decibels (dB) in one ear related to the compensable hearing loss, the worker is entitled to medical aid including hearing aids and batteries.
14. Hearing aids will be authorized when recommended by a certified audiologist or ear, nose, and throat specialist as rehabilitation for a compensable hearing loss or as a means of lessening or eliminating the effects of a compensable hearing loss.
15. Hearing aids purchased for a worker with a compensable hearing loss will be reimbursed to a maximum of \$1600 per hearing aid. The replacement of hearing aids is limited to once every four years.

Where a worker requests a hearing aid that costs more than \$1600, the worker may pay the difference between the approved hearing aid and the requested upgrade.

16. Reimbursement for the purchase of batteries for hearing aids will be authorized up to a maximum of \$ 100 per year for each hearing aid. Receipts for the batteries must be submitted to the Workers Compensation Board to be considered for reimbursement.
17. Noise induced hearing loss does not progress after the worker is removed from the noise exposure. Therefore, a reassessment of the impairment level for hearing loss will only be considered where there has been continued employment exposure to excessive noise levels.

### **Tinnitus**

18. Tinnitus is a perception of sound such as a buzzing, ringing, rushing, whistling or hissing quality. It can be continuous or intermittent. Up to 5% may be added to the worker's measurable binaural hearing impairment rating if the tinnitus results from a compensable hearing loss.

### **Miscellaneous**

19. Where the Workers Compensation Board has determined a worker has hearing loss related to the workplace but the worker's average hearing loss at the four frequencies are not greater than 25 decibels (dB), the Workers Compensation Board will only pay for

**POLICY NUMBER: POL-09**

---

the medical reports and audiogram related to the initial application for compensation benefits.

---

**HISTORY:**

September 12, 2016 - Non-substantive changes to reference Workers Compensation Board policy, POL-90, "Time Frame Limitations for Claims Filing and Invoicing."

November 28, 2013 - Amended to provide clarity with respect to the types of hearing loss there are, the requirements for entitlement to benefits for hearing loss, and to ensure the policy is consistent with the Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition.

January 20, 2009 - Amended to reflect changes which resulted from the Workers Compensation Board adopting the Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition (i.e. removed the reference to Presbycusis).

November 29, 2007 - Amended to clarify the requirements needed to be considered for compensation benefits related to hearing loss.

June 22, 2004 - Amended to include limits placed on the cost of hearing aids and batteries. Policy also clarifies that recommendations for hearing aids must be from certified audiologists and that the permanent impairment award for tinnitus was increased from a maximum of 2% to 5%.

November 16, 2001 - Replaces "Hearing Loss - Noise Induced & Traumatic policy dated April 28, 1994.

Board of Directors Approval Date: April 28, 1994