

POLICY NUMBER: POL-09

Chapter:
CLAIMS

Subject:
HEARING LOSS

Effective Date:
April 28, 1994

Last Updated:
July 30, 2021

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

The purpose of this policy is to describe how the Workers Compensation Board (WCB) 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, 18
Workers Compensation Board Policy, POL-71, Conditions for Entitlement
Workers Compensation Board Policy, POL-89, Impairment
Workers Compensation Board Policy, POL-90, Time Frame Limitations for Claims Filing and Invoicing
Workers Compensation Board Policy, POL-160, Decision Making

DEFINITION:

In this policy:

“Impairment” means a medically measurable, permanent

- (i) loss of physiological function, anatomical function or anatomical structure, or
- (ii) abnormality of psychological function, physiological function, anatomical function or anatomical structure.

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POLICY:

1. Workers who have hearing loss may be entitled to compensation benefits and services if it is determined that the hearing loss is a result of their work.
2. Hearing loss is measured 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 (WCB) to provide this service.
3. To be entitled to benefits and services for hearing loss, all of the following criteria must be met:
 - there must be sufficient evidence of
 - a specific incident causing traumatic hearing loss, or
 - prolonged occupational exposure over a minimum of two years causing noise induced hearing loss;
 - an audiogram must support that there is an average hearing loss at the four frequencies of greater than 25dB in one or both ears (the threshold); and
 - the hearing loss must be work-related, i.e., the activities that caused the hearing loss must have happened at a time and place that is consistent with work, and while in the course of an activity whose purpose is related to work.
4. Claims for hearing loss will be adjudicated using the principles set out in this policy and WCB policy, POL-71, Conditions for Entitlement.

Traumatic Hearing Loss

5. 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 head injury. Traumatic hearing loss may also be caused by chemicals or other materials entering the ear.
6. The date of accident for traumatic hearing loss is the date of the incident.

Noise Induced Hearing Loss

7. Noise induced hearing loss results from prolonged occupational exposure of excessive noise levels over a minimum period of two or more years. In determining entitlement for noise induced hearing loss the following will be considered:

- a) Noise Exposure: There must be 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 WCB may estimate the expected noise levels based on the type of work being performed.
- b) Audiogram results: 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. The WCB will consider whether the audiogram is consistent with the principal characteristics of noise induced hearing loss. The principal characteristics are as follows:
- The hearing loss is sensorineural (involving the inner ear and brain) and not conductive (involving the middle ear).
 - The hearing loss is bilateral (in both ears) and usually has a symmetrical pattern on the audiogram.
 - Noise induced hearing loss does not progress after the worker is removed from the noise exposure.
 - Typically, the first sign of hearing loss due to noise exposure is a "notching" of the audiogram at 3000, 4000, or 6000 Hz, with recovery at 8000 Hertz (Hz).
- c) Other relevant information, such as the worker's age, medical history, medical research and medical opinions, and any factors that may have contributed to the hearing loss, both in and outside of work. To assist in gathering this information, the worker must complete the WCB Hearing Loss Questionnaire.
8. 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 five years of leaving the workplace location with the excessive noise, to be considered for noise induced hearing loss.
9. 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 weight of evidence must support that occupational noise exposure caused the hearing loss, as per WCB policy, POL-160, Decision Making, for the claim to be accepted.
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10. The date of accident for noise induced hearing loss is outlined in WCB policy, POL-90, Time Frame Limitations for Claims Filing and Invoicing.

Hearing Aids and Supplies

11. Where it is determined that 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 health care benefits including a hearing aid(s) and an annual allowance of \$100 per hearing aid to purchase batteries and supplies.
12. Hearing aids will be authorized when recommended by a health care provider approved by the WCB.
13. Hearing aids must be chosen from the list of authorized models and producers approved by the WCB.
14. The replacement of hearing aids is limited to once every four years.
15. The health care provider will bill the WCB directly for:
- the hearing aid(s), at a rate established by the joint procurement committee; and
 - all required services related to the aid, to a maximum of \$1000 per hearing aid. This includes all services, exams, assessments, warranties, repairs and maintenance costs.
16. Where a worker wishes to purchase a hearing aid that is not on the list approved by the WCB, the worker is responsible for payment of any additional costs in excess of the rate established by the joint procurement committee.

Impairment

17. 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.
18. 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)

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in both ears.

19. An impairment award, based on the impairment rating, for hearing loss will be calculated as outlined in WCB policy POL-89, Impairment.
20. 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

21. 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

22. Where it is determined that 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 WCB will only pay for the medical reports and audiogram related to the initial application for compensation benefits.

HISTORY:

July 30, 2021 – Non-substantive edits to terminology.

July 23, 2020 – Non-substantive changes to reflect new policy, Decision Making (POL-160).

September 26, 2019 – Amended to clarify the conditions for entitlement for hearing loss, in particular, noise-induced hearing loss. The amendments set out the eligible expenses for hearing aids and related services, and provide for an allowance to reimburse workers for hearing aid batteries and supplies.

January 10, 2019 – Non-substantive changes to reflect the legislative amendment to the definition of impairment.

September 12, 2016 - Non-substantive changes to reference Workers Compensation Board

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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, 6th Edition.

January 20, 2009 - Amended to reflect changes which resulted from the Workers Compensation Board adopting the Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment, 6th 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