

Caution against earphones & headphones use

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THE Union Health Ministry has warned of hearing loss associated with excessive use of earphones and headphones, especially by the younger population, asking the states and medical colleges to create awareness against its prolonged usage as it could lead to "irreversible hearing damage".

In a letter, Director General of Health Services (DGHS) Prof (Dr) Atul Goel also stresses the importance of limiting screen time for kids. Continuous watching can delay the cognitive development of the brain, affecting social interaction and communication, the officer said.

Prof Goel suggests people use audio devices with volumes not exceeding 50 decibels but for no more than two hours daily and take breaks during listening sessions.

He advises them to use well-fitted or noise-cancelling headphones whenever possible to allow audio to be played at lower volumes.

Regarding children's exposure to online gaming, the DGHS asks the states to make them aware of limiting their exposure to "loud impulsive sounds, frequently employed in



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Prof (Dr) Atul Goel, Director General of Health Services

the game design" and also wants them to reduce the use of social media.

Referring to public events, the professor wants the states to ensure that "the maximum average sound level at venues does not exceed 100 decibels and people have convenient access to quiet zones".

The February 20 letter of the DGHS deals at length with hearing damage. He says, "An important but often overlooked health issue is hearing loss associated with using earphones and headphones, especially affecting the younger age group.

Recent studies have shown that prolonged and excessive exposure to loud music and other sounds through personal audio devices can lead to irreversible hearing damage."

He wants people to make "preventive visits for assessing hearing acuity, check-ups to detect hearing loss early to enable effective treatment options". "Once hearing is permanently impaired, normal hearing will never be restored by hearing aids or cochlear implants. Further, persistent tinnitus from a young age can lead to diverse psychological issues, including

but not limited to depression," he states.

The letter says individuals may also develop a persistent ear ringing or buzzing noise called tinnitus due to prolonged unsafe use.

Suggesting the states and medical colleges take 10 steps to help prevent hearing loss and tinnitus due to prolonged use of earphones/earplugs, Prof. Goel says, "discourage unnecessary use of wired and/or Bluetooth earplugs/headphones (even as normal volumes), that leads to impair hearing, even permanent hearing loss."

Highlighting online gaming and social media use among children, the DGHS says people, especially parents, should be informed about increasing get-together time to focus on family and social interactions.

He suggests that states organise check-ups to detect hearing loss early to enable effective treatment options. According to him, "Once hearing is permanently impaired, normal hearing will never be restored by hearing aids or cochlear implants. Further, persistent tinnitus from a young age can lead to diverse psychological issues, including but not limited to depression."