

Local specialist says personal entertainment devices causing more hearing issues for kids

ROCHELLE —For many years, hearing loss has been considered either an occupational hazard or a natural occurrence of growing old. But as recent studies indicate, and local hearing experts confirm, hearing loss is becoming more and more prevalent in younger demographics, and many children are not getting the treatment they need.

“I don’t think there is any question that we are seeing more and more young people – from children to young adults – come in looking for hearing screenings,” said Chris Pro, owner of Miracle-Ear Service Center of Rochelle.

Pro believes there could be several factors involved but cites noise exposure as one of the biggest threats. Personal entertainment devices, cell phones, exposure to higher decibels of ambient noise are having an impact on hearing loss.

A recent Johns Hopkins study argued that hearing loss nationwide was more widespread than previously believed, with an

estimated 55 million

Americans having hearing loss in one or both ears, with men, whites and the least-educated most affected. The study estimated that 8.5 percent of people age 20-29 have some level of hearing loss.

Studies are also showing that the problem is being left untreated and it could have a serious impact on a young person’s ability to learn. The Better Hearing Institute also released a study earlier this year that states that nearly 1.5 million young people under the age of 21 have hearing loss that could be helped by amplification.

“Children need to be able to hear, not just in the classroom, but also because hearing affects language competence, cognitive development, social and emotional well-being, and

academic achievement,” said Sergei Kochkin, Ph.D., executive director of BHI. “Children who cannot hear well – that is, when their hearing loss is untreated or under-treated – could face a life of underperformance and broken dreams.”

A large part of the problem is that many parents today either don’t recognize their child’s hearing problem, minimize it, or have been given misinformation regarding the ability to treat the child’s hearing loss. In fact, at least 50 percent of parents don’t go back for detailed testing when their infant fails an initial hearing screening.

“I think it’s critical that parents take their children for regular hearing screening, particularly with the level of impact we’re seeing with the use of headphones and other devices,” said Pro.

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