

Noisy transit bad for health

Noise can be harmful on the job, but did you know it can also be harmful on your way to work?

That noisy ride to and from work on a commuter train may be more than annoying. It could be detrimental to your health, according to researchers at the University of Toronto. While most sounds you hear walking, cycling, driving, or taking transit fall within safe levels, sudden bursts of sound can cause long-term hearing loss and other health problems. Using measuring devices attached to their collars, researchers collected noise data in the city on weekdays while riding subways, buses, bikes, or while walking. They found that recommended limits on noise exposure were exceeded in 9 percent of subway measurements, 12 percent of bus measurements, and 14 percent of biking measurements. "We are now starting to understand that chronic excessive noise exposure leads to significant systemic pathology, such as depression, anxiety, increased risk of chronic disease, and increased accident risk," said lead researcher Vincent Lin, MD, FRCSC.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), twenty-two million workers are exposed to potentially damaging noise at work each year. OSHA agrees that loud noise can create physical and psychological stress, interfere with communication and concentration, and contribute to workplace accidents and injuries.



"Okay, okay, we'll turn up the thermostat."

EMPLOYEE SAFETY NEWSLETTER



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Understanding hypothermia

Know the signs and what to do

As winter drags on, it's important to understand and recognize the signs of hypothermia. "Hypothermia" is the loss of body heat from exposure to cold conditions. If you are wet because of sweat, high humidity, or working in a damp environment, or if your clothing becomes wet, hypothermia can happen more quickly. It doesn't need to be very cold for you to experience hypothermia; most cases happen in air temperatures between 30 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) and 50°F, and hypothermia can happen in air temperatures as high as 65°F or water temperatures as warm as 72°F.

What are the signs of hypothermia?

If you have mild hypothermia, you will shiver uncontrollably, and your lips and fingers may turn blue. You may also have poor coordination. You may become confused and disoriented. Your heart rate and breathing will slow down, and your speech may be slurred. Severe hypothermia is very dangerous. You may lose consciousness, your heart rate may be so slow that it is difficult to find a pulse, you will stop shivering, and you may seem not to be breathing. Seek medical help immediately!

What should you do?

You should seek medical help for all cases of hypothermia, even mild ones. While you wait for medical help to arrive, give the following first aid:

- Remove the affected person from the cold environment to a warm shelter.
- Remove wet and cold clothing.
- Wrap the affected person in dry, nonheated blankets.
- Warm the internal areas (neck, chest, abdomen, groin) first. Limbs should be warmed last.
- **DO NOT** place the affected person in front of a hot fire or apply heated blankets or pads.

Working in the cold exposes you to the risk of hypothermia. Prevent hypothermia with these practices:

- Dress in several layers of loose, warm clothing. Choose synthetic materials that wick moisture away from your skin over cotton materials.
- If your clothing becomes wet, remove it and change into dry clothing as soon as possible.
- Consume warm, high-calorie foods while working in cold conditions.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- If possible, avoid activities that lead to heavy sweating.
- Avoid long periods of sitting and standing still. Keep moving.
- In very cold weather, take periodic breaks in a warm, sheltered area.

Snow shoveling tips

Shoveling snow can be a strenuous activity. Cold weather can be taxing on the body. If you live in an area where it snows during the winter, you should be prepared for shoveling with these tips.

Wear appropriate clothing, including a scarf, hat, boots, and gloves. Wear a hat to keep your entire body warmer. Hats reduce the amount of body heat that escapes from your head. Wear insulated, waterproof gloves to keep your hands dry and warm. Keep your neck and face protected from the wind with a scarf or a knit mask. Use insulated and waterproof boots to protect your feet. Check to make sure your boots have a good rubber tread for slippery conditions.

Take frequent breaks in warm areas and warm up before shoveling or cleaning off your car. Keeping warm is important to prevent hypothermia and frostbite from occurring. Be conscious of how long you stay outside shoveling.

Scoop small amounts of snow at a time with your shovel and try to push the snow instead of lifting it, if possible. This will keep you from exhausting yourself before the work is done. Use the proper lifting technique when shoveling. Keep your back straight, lift with your legs, and do not turn or twist the body.

Keep a flat-footing when walking in the snow or ice, especially over paved surfaces. Take short steps and walk at a slower pace so that you are able to react carefully and quickly to a change in traction.



Understanding hypothermia: Quiz

1. It has to be very cold for you to have hypothermia. **True or False**
2. If you have mild hypothermia, your lips may turn blue. **True or False**
3. Which of the following should you *not* do to help someone with hypothermia?
 - A. Place the affected person in front of a fire to warm up.
 - B. Remove wet and cold clothing.
 - C. Wrap the affected person in dry, nonheated blankets.
4. Prevent hypothermia by drinking alcoholic or caffeinated beverages. **True or False**
5. Wear tight clothing in several layers when working outside in the cold. **True or False**

Answers

1. False. It does not need to be very cold for you to get hypothermia. Hypothermia can occur in air temperatures as high as 65 degrees Fahrenheit (°F). **2. True.** Your lips and fingers can turn blue when mild hypothermia sets in. You may also suffer poor coordination. **3. A. Place the person in front of a fire.** You should not place a person in front of a fire or apply heated blankets. Warm the person gently until help arrives. **4. False.** Avoid drinking alcohol and caffeine. Drink water and consume warm, high-calorie foods while working in cold conditions. **5. False.** Make sure you dress for cold, outdoor work appropriately with several layers of loose, warm clothing. Use synthetic materials that wick moisture away from your skin over cotton clothing.

Removing snow from rooftops

According to OSHA, every year workers suffer serious or fatal injuries when performing snow or ice removal from rooftops and other building structures, such as decks. The following are some safety tips to keep in mind when clearing snow from rooftops using a ladder.

- Ensure that your ladder has level and secure footing, and check the ladder rungs for ice.
- Make sure the ladder is positioned correctly and place the base of the ladder a distance from the vertical wall equal to one-fourth the working length of the ladder.
- Extend the ladder 3 feet above the upper level.
- Clean snow from shoes or boots before mounting the ladder.
- If you are using an A-frame ladder, do not stand on the top two steps.
- Always maintain three points of contact with the ladder.
- Keep the center line of the body inside the ladder rails.
- Do not carry heavy or bulky objects or loads up the ladder. Climb up the ladder first, and then pull the equipment up to the working level with a hoisting method, such as a rope.
- Do not use a snow rake or shovel while on a ladder. Using either of these tools increases your risk of losing your balance and falling.
- Remove snow uniformly across the roof and avoid making snow piles on the roof.
- Clear only small amounts of snow at a time to avoid strain and the risk of falling snow.

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