



Employee Says: “I Have a Cold” T K Group Advises: “Please take the test”

We are often asked if it is acceptable for a worker to take a hearing test if he/she has a cold. We say, “Please take the test”. Rarely do symptoms of the common cold preclude one from taking an occupational hearing test.

As we all have experienced, the common cold may give the feeling that our ears are “plugged”. Except in extreme cases, the ears will not be affected to the extent that a hearing loss is produced as result of a head cold. Many confuse the symptoms of a head cold with the more serious symptoms of a middle ear infection (Otitis Media).

“Plugged” ears have varying degrees of severity. An extreme example with a complaint of “fullness” may be the result of *Eustachian Tube Dysfunction* (ETD). Significant ETD may result from cold congestion and the production of excessive mucous. The Eustachian tube is a tube that runs from the nasopharynx to the middle ear cavity. The tube acts to maintain equal pressure between the ambient air outside the body and the air pressure within the middle ear cavity. If this tube becomes obstructed by mucous and congestion, the Eustachian Tube may lose its function to properly equalize middle ear pressure. When this occurs, the air within the middle ear is absorbed by the lining within the middle ear cavity, creating a vacuum. This vacuum results in a negative pressure situation within the middle ear cavity that in turn causes the eardrum to retract or be sucked inward. Resultantly, the eardrum (tympanic membrane) stiffens, creating in some cases a mild conductive hearing loss between 10 to 30 dB. *However, the worst of colds will not typically generate Eustachian Tube Dysfunction.*

OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) has a built in “do over” known as the 30-day retest period. If an employee takes a test and a medical condition (such as a cold) does prove to affect the test, a retest taken with the medical condition remediated will “right the wrong”.

T K Group suggests an additional reason to “take the test”. In the event of an OSHA inspection, it is better to record a “problem” audiogram on an individual rather than to exclude that individual altogether and run the risk of an OSHA infraction due to exclusion.

So if an employee informs you that he/she has a cold and voices concern about taking the test, just say “Please take the test”.

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