

Health and Safety Statement

Westfield State University
Department of Music

The Department of Music at Westfield State University, as required by the National Association of Schools of Music, is obligated to inform students and faculty of health and safety issues, hazards, and procedures inherent in practice, performance, teaching, and listening both in general and as applicable to their specific specializations. This includes but is not limited to information regarding hearing, vocal and musculoskeletal health, injury prevention, and the use, proper handling, and operation of potentially dangerous materials, equipment, and technology.

The Department of Music continues to develop policies, protocols, and operational procedures to guard against injury and illness in the study and practice of music, as well as to raise the awareness among students and faculty of the connections between musicians' health, the suitability and safety of equipment and technology, and the acoustic and other health-related conditions in the University's practice, rehearsal, and performance facilities.

It is important to note that health and safety depends largely on personal decisions made by informed individuals. Each student is personally responsible for avoiding risk and preventing injuries to themselves.

Noise-Related Hearing Loss. Hearing health is essential to your lifelong success as a musician. Your hearing can be permanently damaged by loud sounds, including music. Technically, this is called Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL). Such danger is constant.

The closer you are to the source of a loud sound, the greater the risk of damage to your hearing mechanisms. Sounds over 85 dB in intensity (your typical vacuum cleaner) pose great risk to your hearing. Risk of hearing loss is based upon a combination of loudness intensity and duration.

Recommended maximum daily exposure times to sounds over 85 dB are as follows:

- 85 dB (vacuum cleaner, MP3 player at 1/3 volume) – 8 hours
- 90 dB (hair dryer) – 2 hours
- 94 dB (MP3 player at ½ volume) – 1 hour
- 100 dB (lawnmower, MP3 player at full volume) – 15 minutes
- 110 dB (power tools, rock concert) – 2 minutes
- 120 dB (jet engine at takeoff) without ear protection, damage is immediate

Certain behaviors (controlling volume levels in practice and rehearsal, avoiding noisy environments, turning down the volume, and wearing ear protection) reduce your risk of hearing loss. Be mindful of those MP3 ear buds as these pose a significant danger to hearing health (see chart above).

Day-to-day decisions can impact your hearing health, both now and in the future. Since sound exposure occurs both in and out of school, you also need to learn more and take care of your own hearing health on a daily, even hourly basis. The routine use of ear protection is paramount to protecting your hearing health.

Instrumentalists. There are many potential injuries that are related to playing an instrument, most of which are caused by overuse, repetitive strain, poor posture and improper positioning of the body, arms, legs, hands, fingers, etc. It is very important to consult a doctor if you are experiencing aches and pains or if you feel you're in danger of serious injury. Listed below are some of the most common injuries experienced by instrumentalists:

- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: characterized by a tingling sensation or numbness of the thumb, index and middle finger.
- Tendinitis: inflammation or irritation of the tendons due to overuse or wrong posture/position.
- Bursitis: inflammation or irritation of tendons, muscles or skin.
- Quervain's Tenosynovitis: characterized by pain on the inside of the wrist and forearm.
- Thoracic Outlet Syndrome: may be either neurological or vascular; characterized by pain, swelling or puffiness in the arms and hands, neck and shoulder pains, muscle weakness, difficulty gripping objects, muscle cramps and tingling or numbness in the neck and shoulders.
- Cubital Tunnel Syndrome: pain in the upper extremity such as the arm and elbow.

Observe the following

- Always warm up carefully and with patience.
- Take short breaks throughout your practice and rehearsal sessions to relax and stretch.
- Routinely evaluate your technique and pay attention to your body.
- Routinely evaluate your other activities (such as computer usage, etc.).

Instrument Hygiene. Sharing of instruments is routine in music schools, where students practice and perform on borrowed instruments throughout the year. Certain basic considerations and recommendations for standard operating procedures regarding shared instruments are as follows:

- All students should have their own instrument if possible.
- All students should have their own mouthpiece if possible.
- All students and faculty sharing reed instruments **MUST** have their own individual reeds. Reeds should **NEVER** be shared.
- If instruments must be shared in class, alcohol wipes or Sterisol germicide solution should be available for use between different people. Each user must understand that regular cleaning of these musical instruments is required in order to practice proper hygiene.

Singers. In order to maintain a healthy voice, you must maintain a healthy body. Get regular exercise - yoga, swimming, walking, and biking are excellent activities for vocalists. Hydration is very important: it is recommended that singers consume 100 ounces of water daily, and avoid alcohol, caffeine, and soft drinks.

Avoid illness. Wash your hands regularly, limit contact with surfaces in public whenever possible, disinfect your hands after sneezing, coughing, or touching surfaces that might collect germs.

Warm up the body prior to singing with special attention to release for head and neck, jaw, tongue and face muscles. Train your voice to meet the workload your singing demands. Develop stamina through regular vocal strength and endurance training guide by your instructor.

Prevent vocal abuse:

- Avoid smoking of any kind. Super heated chemically charged smoke passes directly over the vocal folds.
- Avoid excessive loud talking, harsh laughter, yelling and noisy environments.
- Avoid cold medications containing pseudoephedrine as it can contribute to dehydration. NSAID pain relievers pose potential problems for singers, as does alcohol consumption, especially red wine.
- Avoid overuse: practice in short, efficient sessions. If you feel your voice is tired, STOP SINGING and rest for today. If you “mark” your rehearsals when ill, you can be more certain you will be able to sing well for the performance.
- Stop singing before you tire. Good, efficient habits are reinforced in this way.

For excellent information on voice disorder prevention, visit the following link:
http://www.voicefoundation.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=106%3Avoice-disorder-prevention&catid=47%3Avoice-problems&Itemid=49

Like many health-related issues, prevention is much easier and less expensive than cures. Take time to read available information concerning injuries associated with your art.

Resources. Students will find the following books helpful:

- Conable, Barbara. *What Every Musicians Needs to Know About the Body* (GIA Publications, 2000)
- Klickstein, Gerald. *The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness* (Oxford, 2009)
- Norris, Richard N. *The Musician's Survival Manual*