Noise awareness for bar and event staff

A noise briefing for a venue should identify where exposure occurs and what the employer's controls require. Staff may spend time near speakers, stages, plant or equipment even when their main role is service. Explain the designated protection arrangements, how to obtain replacements and how radio communication or warning signals will work. Ask staff to report problems with the arrangement.

GB awareness principles for venues and events; employer noise assessment and local controls apply.

The practical principles

Understand exposure

Loud sound can damage hearing, sometimes gradually and permanently. Exposure depends on both level and time, with very loud peaks also important. Music can create the same occupational risk as machinery. Ringing in the ears or difficulty hearing after a shift should be reported and medically assessed as appropriate. Becoming accustomed to the sound does not show that exposure is safe.

Follow the control plan

Employers should reduce exposure through suitable controls, such as quieter equipment, distance, barriers and work arrangements. Use designated quieter rest areas and follow access restrictions. Hearing protection must suit the exposure and the need to hear warnings. Use the supplied type with the demonstrated fit and keep it in good condition. Ordinary headphones should never be assumed to provide the required protection.

Keep protection effective

Check earplugs or earmuffs before use and replace damaged items under the procedure. Report a poor fit, uncomfortable equipment or difficulty hearing alarms so the arrangement can be corrected. Take part in hearing checks where provided. Staff should know the venue's protection zones and the response to changed sound levels. Exposure assessment and protector selection remain the employer's responsibility.

Work through a shift scenario

Fictional exercise: a bar team is moved closer to the stage during an event. The supervisor checks the revised work location against the noise arrangements, confirms the controls and explains any required hearing protection. A team member says the issued protection is uncomfortable and interferes with communication. That needs a solution through the responsible person, rather than simply removing it for the rest of the shift.

Avoid the common failure

Hearing protection is part of a control programme; it should not replace feasible reduction of noise at source or exposure. A phone app is not a substitute for the assessment needed to set controls. Staff should report hearing concerns and follow the available occupational-health arrangements without trying to diagnose themselves.

A second situation to discuss

Fictional scenario: An event worker removes an earmuff repeatedly because their radio is difficult to hear.

Report the communication problem and obtain an approved arrangement that protects hearing while allowing essential messages. Review positioning and exposure with the supervisor. Repeated removal reduces the protection achieved.

Use a working record

Record the specific arrangements below before the briefing. Keep the wording short enough for a colleague to use during the shift. Where a field does not apply, explain why; where information is missing, assign a person to resolve it. Store personal or sensitive details in the business's approved system.

- Work area
- noise control
- required protection
- fitting information
- communication method
- replacement/reporting contact

At the next handover, ask what changed, which action remains open and who now owns it. Close the record only when the agreed follow-up is complete. A recurring problem should inform the next briefing and the relevant operational procedure.

Check understanding

Noise risk depends on:

Level, duration and peaks Exposure reflects intensity and time, including peaks.

Ringing after a shift should be:

Reported and assessed as appropriate Symptoms may indicate harmful exposure.

Sound check passed, then a speaker moved beside the bar

A monitor is repositioned after sound check. Bartenders now work beside it throughout the set and say they struggle to hear orders. What has changed?

Compare your decision

Report the altered position and affected workers to the event lead. Review the exposure and practical controls, including speaker position, work location and time spent there. Use the venue's hearing-protection arrangements while competent staff assess the change.

Mark the old and new positions on the running sheet. A measurement taken before the move cannot describe the changed workstation on its own.

Sources and scope

- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/regulations.htm
- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/hearingprotection.htm

Original workplace examples and suggested record. Prepared 19 October 2026. Use the current linked guidance and the venue's procedures for operational decisions.

Use this on shift

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details