



Why hearing matters for every child

BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA

Imagine sitting in class while your teacher explains a fun science experiment. Your friends are laughing. Pages are turning. Pens are scratching. But you cannot hear what is being said. The words sound far away, or there is no sound at all.

For as many as 90 million children (between the ages of 5 and 19) around the world, this is not imagination. It is real life. That means in schools across the globe, many students are trying to learn without clearly hearing their teachers, classmates, or even the school bell.

Dr Doreen Nakku, an Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) specialist, says more than half of childhood hearing loss can be prevented. And when hearing problems are found early, children can get the help they need to grow, learn, and succeed.

Every year on March 3, the world marks World Hearing Day. It is a special day to remind everyone how important it is to take care of our ears.

This year's theme is "From communities to classrooms: hearing care for all children." That means making sure children are protected from hearing problems not just at home, but also at school and in their communities. When children can hear well, they can learn well.

Hearing is essential for a child's development. From a young age, children learn to speak and understand language by listening to the sounds around them. Clear hearing helps them follow lessons, answer questions, and build friendships.

"When hearing problems go untreated, they can affect speech, language development, thinking skills, and social confidence. Over time, this may lead to poorer performance in school and fewer opportunities later in life," Dr Nakku says.

Many causes of childhood hearing loss are common and treatable. Ear infections such as otitis media can reduce hearing if not managed properly. Even something as simple as impacted earwax can block sound. In some cases, hearing loss begins gradually and worsens over time, making it harder to notice at first. That is why regular check-ups and paying attention to warning signs like ear pain, difficulty hearing, or frequently asking others to repeat themselves are so important.

Children can protect their hearing by avoiding inserting objects into their ears, keeping headphone volumes at safe levels, and seeking medical care when they experience ear discomfort. Parents and teachers can support this by ensuring children have access to basic health services and by encouraging open communication about hearing concerns.

Dr Nakku says, "Without proper screening, children may struggle silently in the classroom. Integrating hearing checks into school health programmes can make a big difference."

Send your health questions to:
rainbow@ug.nationmedia.com