

## Press Release

### Risks posed by headphones and earbuds



## Keep your ears open in traffic!

- ▶ Listening to music can compromise safety
- ▶ Accident researcher: Important warning signals can be missed
- ▶ Headphone ban for cyclists in some countries

**Pedestrians and cyclists are too often distracted in traffic because they are wearing headphones or earbuds and listening to music. "They are clearly unaware that they are putting themselves in danger", says DEKRA accident researcher Denis Preissner. "Loud music or noise cancellation increases reaction times and the risk of accidents."**

Many people wear headphones or earbuds when walking down the street, cycling, or zipping through the city on an e-scooter. Sure, listening to music or a podcast on the go is fun and passes the time. But there are many reasons why you should refrain from doing so in traffic. The most important one: loud music drowns out ambient noise. When the bass is booming, you simply can't hear the car honking or the tram ringing. Of the five senses, hearing and sight are the most important in traffic. If you switch off one of them, you increase the risk of a crash.

Here's an example: A pedestrian wants to cross the street. He looks right and left, sees no cars, and starts to walk. But he doesn't see the cyclist who suddenly turns the corner behind him, shouting loudly and ringing his bell wildly. Without headphones, he would at least hear that and be able to jump out of the way.

As more people use bicycles and the number of electric cars continues to grow, traffic in cities is also becoming quieter. This improves the quality of life, but in traffic-calmed areas in particular, there is a risk that pedestrians will not hear cyclists, scooter riders, or electric cars.

It can also be problematic to talk on the phone with earbuds while on the go. This limits your awareness of your surroundings. Even if your ear hears warning signals, your brain does not process them or does so too slowly. Even quiet music is distracting. In a test conducted by the Institute for Work and Health of the German

Social Accident Insurance, test subjects who were listening to music reacted 50 percent slower to sirens or horns.

Headphones with noise-canceling function are particularly dangerous. They block out disturbing noises using counter-sound. This is helpful for concentrating or switching off. However, the technology works even at low volumes. Therefore, anyone who thinks they can listen to quiet music and still react quickly to dangers is mistaken. If you must use headphones or earbuds, you should use ones with a transparency mode or ambient sound amplification. Or simply turn off the noise-canceling mode.

“However, no technical aid can replace attention”, says DEKRA accident researcher Preissner. The expert recommends: “The safest option remains to put your smartphone away and take off your headphones – at least when you're on the road.” If you don't want to do without them, you should only use one earbud when listening to music and turn down the volume. This way, your ears remain open to the honking of cars, the ringing of trams, the warning calls of cyclists, etc.

While in many countries, legally, there is nothing to prevent you from wearing headphones or earplugs in traffic, the police in other countries, such as France and Spain, take a much more rigorous approach when they catch car drivers, bicycle or e-scooter riders wearing headphones or earbuds.



### **About DEKRA**

*For 100 years, DEKRA has been a trusted name in safety. Founded in 1925 with the original goal of improving road safety through vehicle inspections, DEKRA has grown to become the world's largest independent, non-listed expert organization in the field of testing, inspection, and certification. Today, as a global partner, the company supports its customers with comprehensive services and solutions to drive safety and sustainability forward—fully aligned with DEKRA's anniversary motto, "Securing the Future." In 2024, DEKRA generated revenue of 4.3 billion euros. Around 48,000 employees are providing qualified and independent expert services in approximately 60 countries across five continents. DEKRA holds a Platinum rating from EcoVadis, placing it among the top 1% of the world's most sustainable companies.*