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# **Regulatory Requirements for Hearing Aid Devices and Personal Sound Amplification Products**

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## **Draft Guidance for Industry and Food and Drug Administration Staff**

***DRAFT GUIDANCE***

**This draft guidance document is being distributed for comment purposes only.**

**Document issued on October 20, 2021.**

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For questions about this document, contact OHT1: Office of Ophthalmic, Anesthesia, Respiratory, ENT and Dental Devices/DHT1B: Division of Dental and ENT Devices/THT1B3: ENT Devices Team at 301-796-5620.

**When final, this guidance will supersede “Guidance for Industry and FDA Staff: Regulatory Requirements for Hearing Aid Devices and Personal Sound Amplification Products,” dated February 25, 2009.**



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Food and Drug Administration  
Center for Devices and Radiological Health**

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## **Preface**

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# Regulatory Requirements for Hearing Aid Devices and Personal Sound Amplification Products

## Draft Guidance for Industry and Food and Drug Administration Staff

*This draft guidance, when finalized, will represent the current thinking of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA or Agency) on this topic. It does not establish any rights for any person and is not binding on FDA or the public. You can use an alternative approach if it satisfies the requirements of the applicable statutes and regulations. To discuss an alternative approach, contact the FDA staff or Office responsible for this guidance as listed on the title page.*

### I. Introduction

This guidance document identifies applicable legal requirements under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (the FD&C Act) for hearing aids and for personal sound amplification products (PSAPs). Hearing aids and PSAPs both affect a user’s ability to hear sound, but the products have different intended uses, and are therefore subject to different regulatory controls. Unlike hearing aids which are intended to aid a person with or compensate for hearing impairment, PSAPs (as defined in Section III) are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, mitigate, or prevent disease and are not intended to affect the structure or function of the body. Therefore, they are not considered to be “devices” as defined in the FD&C Act.<sup>1</sup>

A lack of clarity between PSAPs and hearing aids has contributed to stakeholder and consumer confusion. This guidance is intended to describe hearing aids, PSAPs, their respective intended uses, and the regulatory requirements which apply to both types of products.

The contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way, unless specifically incorporated into a contract. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law. FDA guidance documents, including this guidance, should be viewed only as recommendations, unless specific regulatory or statutory requirements are cited. The use of the

<sup>1</sup> See section 201(h) of the FD&C Act (21 U.S.C. 321(h)).

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33 word *should* in Agency guidance means that something is suggested or recommended, but not  
34 required.  
35

## 36 **II. Background**

37 The FDA Reauthorization Act of 2017 (FDARA) (Pub. L. 115-52) directs FDA to establish a  
38 category of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids through rulemaking, and mandates that FDA  
39 establish various requirements for this category of devices. FDA has issued a proposed rule to  
40 establish the OTC category of hearing aids and implement the requirements of FDARA  
41 (“Proposed Rule”).<sup>2</sup> In this Proposed Rule, FDA has also proposed multiple related changes to  
42 the overall regulatory framework for hearing aids to harmonize existing regulations with the  
43 proposed OTC category while continuing to provide reasonable assurance of safety and  
44 effectiveness. Specifically, this Proposed Rule, once finalized, would define OTC hearing aids  
45 and establish applicable requirements; amend existing rules for consistency with the new OTC  
46 category, and these amended rules will apply to most other hearing aids which will then be  
47 regulated as prescription devices (proposed 21 CFR 801.422); repeal the conditions for sale  
48 applicable to hearing aids under 21 CFR 801.421; and update regulations relating to decisions on  
49 applications for exemption from Federal preemption that may no longer apply.

50  
51 FDARA also directed FDA to update and finalize the draft guidance entitled “Regulatory  
52 Requirements for Hearing Aid Devices and Personal Sound Amplification Products,” issued on  
53 November 7, 2013.<sup>3</sup> In order to fulfill this FDARA requirement, FDA is issuing this updated  
54 draft guidance which supersedes the November 7, 2013 draft guidance. If the Proposed Rule is  
55 finalized, there will be a heightened need to appropriately inform consumers by clearly  
56 distinguishing PSAPs from OTC hearing aids from a regulatory standpoint. This guidance is  
57 intended to accomplish that goal. We intend to continue to take a risk-based approach to  
58 enforcing our regulations to protect the public health.

59  
60 Because we are proposing to change the requirements that apply to hearing aids, this guidance  
61 references the current regulations using the current citation in the Code of Federal Regulations  
62 (CFR) and to the proposed regulations, which are further described in the Proposed Rule, by  
63 citing to the proposed CFR citation, e.g., proposed 21 CFR 800.30(a).

64  
65 FDA provides additional information regarding hearing aids on the following website:  
66 <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/consumer-products/hearing-aids>.

67

## 68 **III. Definitions and Scope**

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<sup>2</sup> “Establishing Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids” available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2021-22473>.

<sup>3</sup> See FDARA section 709(c) (Pub. L. 115-52, 131 Stat. 1067).

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69 A hearing aid is “any wearable instrument or device designed for, offered for the purpose of, or  
70 represented as aiding persons with or compensating for, impaired hearing” (21 CFR 801.420(a);  
71 a similar definition is provided in proposed 21 CFR 800.30(b)). This definition encompasses  
72 both air-conduction and bone-conduction devices in a variety of styles (e.g., behind-the-ear, in-  
73 the-canal, body worn). Hearing aids are devices as defined by section 201(h) of the FD&C Act.<sup>4</sup>  
74 Hearing aids do not include cochlear implants or implantable middle ear hearing devices, which  
75 are class III devices that require an approved premarket approval (PMA) application before  
76 marketing (section 513(a) of the FD&C Act). In contrast, an electronic product<sup>5</sup> that is intended  
77 for non-hearing impaired consumers to amplify sounds in certain environments, such as for  
78 hunting or other recreational activities, and is not intended to aid persons with or compensate for  
79 impaired hearing, is considered a PSAP. Such PSAPs are not devices as defined in section 201(h)  
80 of the FD&C Act and therefore, are not regulated as such.

81  
82 Currently, hearing aid devices may be classified<sup>6</sup> as:

- 83 • class I devices, exempt<sup>7</sup> from premarket notification (510(k)) (21 CFR  
84 874.3300(b)(1));
- 85 • class II devices, which require premarket notification (510(k)) and compliance with  
86 special controls (if applicable to the specific regulation) before marketing (21 CFR  
87 874.3300(b)(2), 21 CFR 874.3315, 21 CFR 874.3325, and 21 CFR 874.3950); or
- 88 • class II devices that are exempt<sup>8</sup> from premarket notification (510(k)), subject to  
89 required special controls (21 CFR 874.3305).<sup>9</sup>

90

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<sup>4</sup> A device is an instrument, apparatus, implement, machine, contrivance, implant, in vitro reagent, or other similar or related article, including any component, part, or accessory, intended for use in the diagnosis of disease or other conditions, or in the cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease, in man or other animals, or intended to affect the structure or any function of the body of man or other animals, and which does not achieve its primary intended purposes through chemical action within or on the body of man or other animals and which is not dependent upon being metabolized for the achievement of its primary intended purposes. The term "device" does not include software functions excluded pursuant to section 520(o). See section 201(h) of the FD&C Act (21 U.S.C. 321(h)).

<sup>5</sup> The term “electronic product” means (A) any manufactured or assembled product which, when in operation, (i) contains or acts as part of an electronic circuit and (ii) emits (or in the absence of effective shielding or other controls would emit) electronic product radiation, or (B) any manufactured or assembled article which is intended for use as a component, part, or accessory of a product described in clause (A) and which when in operation emits (or in the absence of effective shielding or other controls would emit) such radiation. See section 531(2) of the FD&C Act (21 U.S.C. 360hh(2)).

<sup>6</sup> Tactile hearing aids, under product code LRA, are currently unclassified devices, subject to premarket notification (510(k)). They are a preamendments device type and do not have a classification regulation.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to 21 CFR 874.9 for the limitations of exemptions from 510(k).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> In accordance with 21 CFR 874.9, an air-conduction hearing aid device under 21 CFR 874.3300(b)(1) and a wireless air-conduction hearing aid under 21 CFR 874.3305 are exempt from premarket notification unless the device: 1) is intended for a use different from the intended use of a legally marketed device of that generic type, or 2) if the device operates using a different fundamental scientific technology than a legally marketed device of that generic type.

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91 Product codes for the various types of devices under these classification regulations are listed  
92 below:

93 **Table 1 – Relevant Product Codes**  
94

<b>Regulation Number<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>Product Code and Name</b>
21 CFR 874.3300	LRB (Face Plate Hearing Aid)
21 CFR 874.3300	ESD (Hearing Aid, Air Conduction)
21 CFR 874.3300	LDG (Kit, Earmold, Impression)
21 CFR 874.3300	LXB (Hearing Aid, Bone Conduction)
21 CFR 874.3300	MAH (Hearing Aid, Bone Conduction, Implanted)
21 CFR 874.3305	OSM (Hearing Aid, Air Conduction with Wireless Technology)
21 CFR 874.3315	PLK (Tympanic Membrane Direct Contact Hearing Aid)
21 CFR 874.3325	QDD (Self-Fitting Air-Conduction Hearing Aid)
21 CFR 874.3950	NIX (Hearing Aid, Air Conduction, Transcutaneous System)

95  
96 Although the product codes listed above are current as of the date of issuance of this guidance,  
97 new product codes may be created over time for hearing aids regulated under the classification  
98 regulations identified above and would fall within the scope of this guidance. We recommend  
99 that you reference the product code database  
100 (<http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPCD/classification.cfm>) if you are unsure  
101 whether this guidance applies to your device and the product code for your device is not already  
102 captured in this guidance.  
103

104 Although the Proposed Rule has proposed amendments to the classification regulations for  
105 hearing aids, these proposals do not impact the scope of this guidance. We will ensure that the  
106 final version of this guidance aligns and is consistent with the Final Rule when the Proposed  
107 Rule is finalized.  
108

109 This guidance does not apply to the group hearing aid or group auditory trainer (21 CFR  
110 874.3320), master hearing aid (21 CFR 874.3330), and tinnitus masker (21 CFR 874.3400).  
111

## 112 **IV. Regulatory Requirements**

113 As discussed in Section III, hearing aids are devices under section 201(h) of the FD&C Act and  
114 PSAPs (as defined in Section III) are not devices as defined by section 201(h) and therefore, are  
115 not regulated as such. This section provides further clarity regarding the intended uses of hearing  
116 aids and PSAPs and the regulatory requirements for both types of products.

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<sup>10</sup> These are the regulation numbers that currently apply to the product codes identified. These are subject to change as described in the Proposed Rule.

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117 **A. Hearing Aids**

118 As devices, hearing aids are subject to applicable device requirements under the FD&C Act and  
119 FDA regulations (e.g., adverse event reporting). FDA regulations also include specific  
120 requirements for hearing aids that are discussed below. Hearing aids are also electronic  
121 products, and therefore, are subject to applicable electronic product requirements under the  
122 FD&C Act and FDA regulations (these requirements are discussed in the PSAP section below).

123  
124 FDA’s regulation of hearing aids is intended to provide consumers access to safe and effective  
125 hearing aids and ensure that consumers understand how to use available technology and  
126 understand when to seek an evaluation by a qualified professional. Specific information in  
127 hearing aid labeling is essential in order for consumers and hearing aid dispensers to identify  
128 conditions that either may pose a threat to health if left undiagnosed, or avoid unnecessary and  
129 inappropriate hearing aid use (e.g., cerumen (earwax) impaction). Specific information in  
130 hearing aid labeling will also help consumers and hearing aid dispensers choose appropriate  
131 hearing aids that are safe and effective for the consumer’s hearing condition. Equipped with this  
132 information, consumers can better decide how to address their needs among all options available  
133 to them.

134  
135 Currently, all hearing aids must comply with specific requirements regarding patient and  
136 professional labeling identified in 21 CFR 801.420. This regulation includes specific labeling  
137 requirements for the hearing aid device itself (e.g., device model, serial number, year of  
138 manufacture) as well as the content of the User Instructional Brochure that must be provided to  
139 potential hearing aid recipients (e.g., technical data, “Warning to Hearing Aid Dispensers”  
140 statement which specifies that the dispenser should advise a prospective user to consult  
141 promptly with a licensed physician before dispensing a hearing aid if the dispenser determines  
142 that the prospective user has any of the specified conditions).

143  
144 Additionally, all hearing aids are subject to required conditions for sale, as stated in 21 CFR  
145 801.421. FDA’s guidance, “[Conditions for Sale for Air-Conduction Hearing Aids](#)” (“Conditions  
146 for Sale Guidance”),<sup>11</sup> describes the Agency’s current enforcement policy with respect to these  
147 conditions for sale. As explained in the [Conditions for Sale Guidance](#), FDA does not intend to  
148 enforce the medical evaluation (21 CFR 801.421(a)) or recordkeeping (21 CFR 801.421(d))  
149 requirements prior to the dispensing of certain hearing aid devices to individuals 18 years of age  
150 and older. However, as explained in the [Conditions for Sale Guidance](#), FDA intends to continue  
151 to enforce 21 CFR 801.421(b) and (c), which require hearing aid dispensers to provide  
152 prospective users an opportunity to review and to make available the “User Instructional  
153 Brochure,” containing specific required labeling, before the sale of a hearing aid. These

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<sup>11</sup> For additional details regarding the Agency’s enforcement policy, please refer to the FDA guidance “[Conditions for Sale for Air-Conduction Hearing Aids](#),” available at <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/immediately-effect-guidance-document-conditions-sale-air-conduction-hearing-aids>.

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154 regulatory conditions for sale were established to encourage prospective users to receive proper  
155 medical evaluation and treatment for treatable causes of hearing loss/impaired hearing.  
156

157 Consistent with the Proposed Rule, when finalized, OTC hearing aids, as defined therein, must  
158 comply with the requirements for OTC hearing aids (proposed 21 CFR 800.30); in addition, we  
159 are proposing to repeal the conditions for sale in 21 CFR 801.421 and amend the labeling  
160 requirements in 21 CFR 801.420 (by moving them to proposed 21 CFR 801.422, limiting their  
161 scope to prescription hearing aids, and revising them as appropriate to provide consistency with  
162 the new labeling requirements for OTC hearing aids in proposed 21 CFR 800.30). Thus, once  
163 the Proposed Rule is finalized, prescription hearing aids would need to comply with the hearing  
164 aid specific requirements of proposed 21 CFR 801.422, which are similar to the requirements in  
165 21 CFR 801.420.

### **B. Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPs)**

167 This subsection describes PSAPs that fall within the definition provided in Section III of this  
168 document. PSAPs are not intended to compensate for hearing impairment. They are intended to  
169 accentuate sounds in specific listening environments for non-hearing impaired listeners. Because  
170 PSAPs are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, mitigate, or prevent disease and are not intended  
171 to affect the structure or function of the body, they are not devices as defined in the FD&C Act.<sup>12</sup>  
172 As such, there is no regulatory classification or product code for these products. Furthermore,  
173 there are no requirements for registration of manufacturers or listing of these products with FDA.  
174 However, PSAPs are subject to applicable provisions of the Radiation Control for Health and  
175 Safety Act of 1968,<sup>13</sup> under which FDA regulates electronic products that emit sonic vibrations,  
176 such as sound amplification equipment.<sup>14</sup> Manufacturers of PSAPs must report accidental  
177 radiation occurrences under 21 CFR Part 1002, and report defects and take other measures  
178 described in 21 CFR Part 1003. Manufacturers of PSAPs must also comply with the requirements  
179 to repurchase, repair, or replace electronic products under 21 CFR Part 1004.  
180

181 Examples of situations in which PSAPs typically are used include hunting (listening for prey),  
182 bird watching, listening to lectures with a distant speaker, and listening to soft sounds that would  
183 be difficult for normal hearing individuals to hear (e.g., distant conversations).

### **C. Distinction between PSAPs and Hearing Aids**

185 FDA is aware of confusion in the marketplace over what FDA considers a hearing aid and what  
186 it considers a PSAP. While the technology of hearing aids and PSAPs may be similar, FDA  
187 considers the intended use of each product to determine whether it is a device or solely an  
188 electronic product. A product's intended use refers to the "objective intent" of those legally  
189 responsible for the labeling of the product, which may be shown by their oral or written  
190 expressions, the design or composition of the product, or by the circumstances surrounding the

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<sup>12</sup> See section 201(h) of the FD&C Act (21 U.S.C. 321(h)).

<sup>13</sup> Sections 531 to 542 of the FD&C Act (21 U.S.C. 360hh-ss).

<sup>14</sup> See 21 CFR 1000.15(d).

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191 distribution of the product.<sup>15</sup> This objective intent may be shown, for example, by the claims  
192 made in product labeling or advertising, and from other relevant sources.<sup>16,17</sup> Accordingly, FDA  
193 may consider, among other things, any written or oral claims or statements in any label, labeling,  
194 advertising, and/or promotion of a product by or on behalf of a firm<sup>18</sup> in determining whether a  
195 product is a device.

196  
197 Explicitly or implicitly claiming or stating that a product addresses, mitigates, or improves  
198 hearing loss/impaired hearing would be considered an intent to diagnose, treat, cure, mitigate, or  
199 prevent disease or to affect the structure or function of the body. The following are examples of  
200 explicit or implicit claims or statements that FDA believes would generally cause the product to  
201 meet the device definition, in which case the product would be subject to the regulatory  
202 requirements applicable to devices, including the specific requirements applicable to hearing  
203 aids, as discussed above in this guidance:

- 204
- 205 • suggestions that the product is for users with certain types or severity of hearing  
206 loss/impaired hearing;
  - 207 • suggestions that the product is indicated for use in situations that are typically  
208 associated with and indicative of hearing loss/impaired hearing;
  - 209 • suggestions that the product is an alternative to a hearing aid (PSAPs are not  
210 considered “over-the-counter” alternatives or substitutes for a hearing aid), for  
211 example, marketing it as a less expensive alternative to hearing aids or marketing it to  
212 consumers who may have hearing loss/impaired hearing and are not yet ready to buy  
213 hearing aids;
  - 214 • information conveyed to the user to optimize the product to their hearing  
215 loss/impaired hearing profile (e.g., providing hearing thresholds or a measure of  
216 hearing loss/impaired hearing, or using a hearing aid fitting formula or other  
217 algorithms to program the product output to match the user’s hearing loss/impaired  
218 hearing profile).

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<sup>15</sup> See 21 CFR 801.4.

<sup>16</sup> See *id.*

<sup>17</sup> “Labeling” is defined in section 201(m) of the FD&C Act (21 U.S.C. 321(m)) as “all labels and other written, printed, or graphic matter (1) upon any article or any of its containers or wrappers, or (2) accompanying such article.” Labeling may include promotional materials.

<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of this guidance document, the term “firm” is used to refer to “persons legally responsible for the labeling of an article (or their representatives)” under 21 CFR 801.4.