School teachers are one of the largest groups of professional voice users world-wide. Your voice is your primary tool of trade, your main mode of communication in the classroom and one of your most powerful assets. Teaching however places many demands on your voice. Talking excessively, talking loudly, speaking over background noise, and speaking and projecting your voice over large distances in the playground or on the sports field are just some of the vocal pressures you confront every day.

Because of these vocal demands, teachers are at increased risk of developing voice problems.

Fortunately, it is not difficult for most teachers to avoid voice problems and for you to have an effective voice for your entire teaching career and beyond.

Strategies for maintaining voice quality

**DO**
- Use methods of behaviour management that do not involve yelling or loud talking.
- Stand in a place in the classroom that makes it easier for children to hear you.
- Move closer to children or have them move closer to you when talking to them.
- Arrange the classroom so those students who are likely to be noisy or need extra attention are at the front.
- Talk to children or classes mainly when children are quiet.
- Give instructions to a small number of children who have responsibility for informing the rest of the class.
- Use routines such as playing a particular piece of music to signal changes in activities.
- Use pauses and variations in intonation (inflection) rather than loudness to gain attention and increase the responsiveness of children.
- Use non-verbal means to gain attention and convey some of your message – use hand and arm gestures or sound signals such as clapping or a bell/whistle/children’s party clickers.
- Turn down background noise such as radios, television, PA systems, or move away from the source of noise when talking.
- Keep a water bottle with you and drink at least two litres of water each day.

**DO NOT**
- Ignore feelings of throat fatigue, dryness, soreness, or strain – these are danger signals.
- Force yourself to speak by whispering to protect your voice.
- Drink too much coffee as it can cause dehydration and have a negative impact on your vocal cords. Instead, stay hydrated – Keep a water bottle with you and drink at least two litres of water each day.
- Use medicated throat lozenges when your throat feels dry or sore. Instead, suck or chew a sweet, or push air up from your lungs in short, quiet bursts and sip water.
- Overload your voice if you have a throat infection — restrict the amount of speaking you do, avoid all forms of load or strained speaking and don’t whisper. Avoid all but essential talking and seek medical advice from your local GP or speech pathologist.

Contact:
For more information contact your OHS Advisor at your Regional Office or go to the Department website: www.education.vic.gov.au/hr/ohs/hazards/voicecare.htm