

Are You a

Teen Worker?

Updated



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health



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So You're a Teen Worker?

You're earning your own money. You're making new friends. You're learning new things and becoming independent. Work can be a fun, rewarding, and an exciting part of your life. But did you know that your job could harm you?

Every 9 minutes, a U.S. teen gets hurt on the job. These teens are young people like Emily, who was working alone at a sandwich shop when a robber with a gun attacked her. And they're like Joe, a construction helper who was electrocuted on his job.

It doesn't have to be this way. You have a right to be safe and healthy at work.

Young workers get sick or hurt on the job for many reasons—dangerous equipment, an unsafe workplace, stress. Sometimes they're hurt from working too fast so they can keep up. As a young worker, you're more likely than an older person to be injured on the job. You may even be asked to do something that the law says you're not allowed to do! (See "Is It OK for Me to Do Any Kind of Work?" on page 3.)

This guide gives you the facts you need to stay safe and healthy at work. It also shows you what jobs you can (and can't) do, and it teaches you about your rights and responsibilities as a young worker. (Farm jobs aren't covered here, because the laws for farm work are different.) The Resources on page 5 will give you ideas about where to go for help if you have a health or safety problem at work. Don't be afraid to speak up!

Have fun, stay safe, and remember that no job is worth your health—or your life.

What Are My Rights at Work?

You have a right to:

- Work in a safe and healthy place.
- Get safety and health training—where required—in words you can understand.
- Earn at least the federal minimum wage. Find your state's minimum wage at www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm.
- Get paid for medical care (for most jobs) if you are hurt or sick because of your job. You may also be paid for work you missed because you were hurt or made sick on the job.
- Work without being harassed or being treated poorly because of your race, skin color, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, disability or genetic information.
- Ask for changes to your workspace because of your religious beliefs or a medical condition.
- Help someone who is investigating or inspecting your workplace for possible violations of workplace safety, child labor, or wage laws, or laws that ban job discrimination and harassment. You can't be mistreated or fired for giving this kind of help.
- Join or start a union. You can work in a group to try to improve working conditions, pay, and benefits.

Remember:

You may have more workplace rights under other federal, state, or local laws or under your company's own rules.

You have a right to speak up about possible violations of workplace safety, child labor, or wage laws, or laws that ban job discrimination and harassment!

It is against the law for you to be fired or mistreated in any other way for reporting these problems. You can talk to a parent, coworker, teacher, school counselor, employer, or government agency. The Resources on page 5 will help you start the conversation.

Certain laws protect you against job discrimination and harassment based on your race, skin color, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, disability or genetic information!

By law, your employer must make the place where you work safe and healthy. Your employer must give you training about the hazards of your job when the law requires it. You must also be given protective gear (like safety glasses, ear plugs, and gloves) at no cost to you, if you need them.

But you also have responsibilities at work. Talk to someone—a parent, teacher, coworker, your boss—if you are asked to do dangerous work or tasks that make you uncomfortable in any way. Report hazards to a trusted adult, your supervisor, or to a federal or state agency.

The better you understand your employer’s responsibilities—and your own—the better your chances of staying safe and healthy at work!

What Are My Employer’s Responsibilities at Work?

Your employer must:

- Provide a safe and healthy place to work.
- Choose and provide, at no cost to you, safety gear that can protect you as you work. This includes such things as ear plugs, gloves, safety glasses, or special clothing (if needed).
- Use words you can understand when you receive training about workplace hazards.
- Tell you about hazards on your job site and, if required by law, how to deal with them. This includes training on how to handle chemicals safely and deal with other workplace hazards. You may also be required to get training on how to respond to emergencies.

What Are My Responsibilities at Work?

As a young worker, you should:

- Learn your rights and responsibilities that apply to safety and health where you work. Ask a coworker, school counselor, or your boss about this or read the employee bulletin board or handbook.
- Ask your boss about safety training and learn about the dangers before you start a job or a new task.
- Report any health and safety hazards to your supervisor.
- Find out what to do if you get hurt at work.
- Know and follow all safety rules and instructions.
- Use safety equipment and protective clothing when needed.
- Stay alert and work safely.
- Don’t take shortcuts.
- Look out for your fellow workers.
- Find out what to do in an emergency from your supervisor or coworkers.
- Respect the people you work with. Never harass or bully anyone.

What’s a hazard?

A hazard is anything at work that can hurt you.

Common (nonfarm) workplace hazards and injuries:

Slips, trips, falls, strains, and sprains

Burns and cuts

Eye injuries

Hearing loss

Chemical exposure

Motor vehicle crashes

Electrocution

Machinery malfunctions

Learn about the dangers before you start a new job.

Ask your boss:

What job safety training will I get?

What are the hazards on this job?

Will I need to wear safety gear? If yes, how do I use it?

If I have health and safety concerns, who do I ask?

What do I do in an emergency?

What do I do if I get hurt at work?

What Kind of Work Shouldn't I Do?

Child labor laws protect teen workers from dangerous jobs.

In general, if you're under 18, you can't

- Drive anything with a motor on public streets as part of the job (17-year-olds may drive, but only for a few reasons that the law allows).
- Drive, ride on, repair, or work from a forklift, Bobcat, backhoe, or other powered machinery.
- Drive, ride on, repair, or work from powered hoists such as cherry pickers (16- or 17-year-olds can assist in operating patient-lifting devices when properly trained and supervised).
- Use power tools and machinery like a circular saw, chain saw, wood chipper, box crusher, paper baler, meat slicer, and most bakery machines.
- Work in wrecking, demolition, excavation, or roofing.
- Work in mining, logging, a sawmill, forestry services, or forest firefighting.
- Work in meat and poultry plants that slaughter, package, or process meat.
- Work where you can be exposed to radiation.
- Work where explosives are produced or stored.

If you're 14 or 15, the laws are even stricter. You also can't

- Bake or cook on the job, unless the cooking uses electric or gas grills with no open flames or deep fat fryers that by themselves can lower and raise baskets into and out of the oil.
- Go from house to house to sell things or do "sign-waving" (unless you are directly in front of the place where you work).
- Work as a lifeguard on elevated water slides or at lakes, rivers, ocean beaches, quarries, or piers. (With training, 15-year-olds may be a lifeguard at pools and water parks.)
- Use most power-driven machinery.
- Work on a ladder or scaffold.
- Work in warehouses.
- Take jobs in construction, manufacturing, mining, and most types of businesses—such as dry cleaning or commercial laundry facilities—that process items.
- Load or unload a truck, railroad car, or conveyor.





What if I'm under 14? Can I work?

You CAN do a few jobs:

- Baby sit.
- Deliver newspapers.
- Work as an actor or performer.

Are These ALL the Jobs I Can't Do?

NO! Many jobs, other than those listed here, are off limits to young workers. Check with your school counselor, job placement coordinator, the U.S. Department of Labor, or your State Department of Labor to make sure you are allowed to do a job.

Keep in mind that

- State child labor laws may be stricter than federal laws.
- Other laws cover farm jobs for young workers.
- When you turn 18, child labor laws no longer protect you—but workplace safety and health laws do.

What Hours Can I Work?

Federal child labor laws protect teens ages 14 and 15 from working too long, too late, or too early. Some state laws also limit the hours 16- and 17-year-olds can work. When you turn 18, child labor laws no longer protect you.

Federal Work Hours for Teens (ages 14 and 15)

Work hours

- Not before 7 a.m. or after 7 p.m. from Labor Day to June 1
- Not during school hours
- 7 a.m.–9 p.m. from June 1 to Labor Day

Maximum hours when school is in session

18 hours a week, but not more than

- 3 hours a day on school days, including Fridays
- 8 hours a day Saturdays and Sundays

Maximum hours when school is not in session

- 40 hours a week
- 8 hours a day

Note: Exceptions to the work hours listed above apply to students participating in certain school-based work experience programs. Farm jobs for teens under age 16 have different work hour requirements.

Where Do I Go for More Info?

Discuss workplace health, safety, discrimination, and harassment concerns with a manager, parent, teacher, or someone you work with.

Find more information about young worker safety and health at www.youthrules.dol.gov.

Contact one of the government agencies listed below:

Type of Information	Agency
Federal and state child labor laws (includes wage and hour)	Department of Labor (DOL) www.dol.gov/whd 1-866-4US-WAGE TTY: 1-877-889-5627
Safety and health standards and other requirements	Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers 1-800-321-OSHA TTY: 1-877-889-5627
Discrimination and harassment information	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) www.youth.eeoc.gov 1-800-669-4000 TTY: 1-800-669-6820
Workplace hazards and solutions	National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/youth 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
Unfair labor practices and/or union elections	National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) www.nlr.gov 1-866-667-NLRB

The Federal Network for Young Worker Safety and Health (FedNet) updated this brochure, which was prepared originally by the UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program under a cooperative agreement from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 97-132. An update to the original document developed for California is available at: www.lohp.org/docs/pubs/youth_work/ywfs2008.pdf

Remember, you have a right to speak up about possible violations of workplace safety, child labor and wage laws, and laws that ban job discrimination and harassment! You can't be punished for reporting these problems!



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