



UPDATE

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NIOSH Warns: Employment May be Hazardous for Adolescent Workers



Each year approximately 70 adolescents die from injuries at work, hundreds more are hospitalized, and tens of thousands require treatment in hospital emergency rooms.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recently released an Alert which details hazardous jobs for adolescent workers. The document reveals that motor vehicle deaths accounted for the greatest number of work-related deaths of 16 and 17-year-olds between 1980-1989. Motor vehicle deaths include delivery services, road construction work, and work at gas stations. Other leading causes of death include machine related incidents, electrocutions, assaults and violent acts, and falls. Related research indicates that many adolescent workplace deaths may be associated with activities prohibited by child labor laws.

"While the benefits of working are clear, we must recognize that thousands of adolescents are injured or killed in the workplace each year," said Dr. Linda Rosenstock, NIOSH Director. "Work should be a fulfilling and educational life experience for young people, not a life threatening one."

NIOSH estimates that nearly 64,000 adolescents required treatment in hospital emergency rooms for work-related injuries in 1992. Burns associated with food service and sprains and strains due to overexertion are among the most serious. Sixty-eight percent of those injured experienced limitations in their normal activities for at least one day and 25% experienced limitations for more than a week. More than half of those injured reported that they had not received any safety and health training.

In addition to injuries, hazardous materials and working conditions are also a concern for adolescents. They may be exposed to pesticides in farm work and lawn care, benzene at gasoline stations, asbestos and silica in construction and maintenance work, and high levels of noise in manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. These exposures may result in immediate illness or may not be detected for months or years later.

The United States has more of its children in the workforce than any other developed country. We must ensure that our young people reap the benefits of employment without becoming victim to the hazards which all too often accompany work.

NIOSH requests assistance in protecting the safety of this country's working adolescent population. The following page contains information on how we can all do our part to protect the workforce of the future.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

CDC
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL
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What Can I Do?

Employers, parents, counselors, teachers, and adolescent workers may be unaware of the risks associated with work. However, we all have a role to play in protecting adolescent workers. The following information explains how we can ensure the safety of our future workforce.

Employers

- Provide training to ensure that adolescents recognize hazards and are competent in safe work practices.
- Ensure that adolescents are appropriately supervised to prevent injuries and hazardous exposures.
- Develop an injury and illness prevention program to identify and solve safety and health problems.
- Evaluate equipment that adolescents operate to ensure that it is safe for use by adolescents.
- Know and comply with child labor laws and occupational safety and health regulations. Post these regulations for all employees to read.

Educators

- Talk to students about safety and health hazards in the workplace and students' rights and responsibilities as workers.
- Ensure that school-based work experience programs (such as vocational education and School-to-Work programs) provide students with a safe and healthful work environment and training in hazard recognition, safe work practices, and workers' rights and responsibilities.
- Incorporate information about occupational safety and health into school curricula to better prepare students for the world of work.

- If you are responsible for signing work permits, know the State and Federal child labor laws.

Parents

- Take an active role in the employment decisions of your children.
- Discuss with your children the types of work they are involved in and the training and supervision provided by their employer.

Adolescents

- Be aware that you have the right to work in a safe and healthful work environment free of recognized hazards and have the right to refuse unsafe work tasks and conditions.
- Obtain information about your rights and responsibilities from school counselors and State labor departments.
- Know that you can file complaints when you feel your rights have been violated or your safety has been jeopardized.
- Remember that all workers, including adolescents, are entitled to workers' compensation in the event of work injury or illness.
- Recognize the potential for injury at work and seek information about safe work practices from employers, State labor departments, and NIOSH.
- Follow safe work practices.

To receive a copy of the NIOSH Alert, *Preventing Deaths and Injuries of Adolescent Workers* (Pub No. 95-125) or for more information on these or other workplace concerns call:

1-800-35-NIOSH