

# Facts for Employers

## Safer Jobs for Teens



### FIVE STEPS TO SAFER TEEN JOBS

Each year 30 teens under 18 die from work injuries in the U.S. About 27,000 are injured seriously enough to require emergency room treatment. There's a lot that employers can do to prevent injuries to their teen workers. The measures you take to keep teens safe will help protect all employees. Begin by following these steps:

#### 1 Know and Comply with the Law

- » Understand the California child labor laws. Make sure teen employees are not assigned work schedules that violate the law, or given prohibited job tasks like operating heavy equipment or using power tools.
- » Understand and comply with Cal/OSHA's workplace safety and health regulations. These are designed to protect all employees, including teens, from injury.
- » See later sections of this factsheet for more information.

#### 2 Make Sure Teens Have Work Permits

- » Workers under 18 must apply for work permits at their school or school district office before beginning a new job. Work permits are not required for those who have graduated from high school or passed the high school equivalency exam.

#### 3 Stress Safety to Supervisors

- » Make sure frontline supervisors who give teens their job assignments know the law.
- » Encourage supervisors to set a good example. They are in the best position to influence teens' attitudes and work habits.

#### 4 Set Up a Safety and Health Program

- » Make sure all jobs and work areas are free of hazards. The law requires you to provide a safe and healthy workplace.
- » Under Cal/OSHA regulations, every workplace must have an Injury and Illness Prevention Program. Involve every worker in the program, including teens.

#### 5 Train Teens to Put Safety First

- » Give teens clear instructions for each task, especially unfamiliar ones. Provide hands-on training on the correct use of equipment. Show them what safety precautions to take. Give them a chance to ask questions.
- » Observe teens while they work, and correct any mistakes. Retrain them regularly.
- » Encourage teens to let you know if there's a problem or directions are unclear. Make sure teens feel free to speak up.
- » Prepare teens for emergencies—accidents, fires, violent situations, etc. Show them escape routes and explain where to go if they need emergency medical treatment.
- » Supply personal protective equipment when needed—goggles, safety shoes, masks, hard hats, gloves, etc. Be sure that teens know how to use it.

# What Work Does the Law Prohibit Teens From Doing?

The lists below give the major restrictions. There are other restrictions depending on the industry and the worker's age. Also, there are limited exemptions for youth under 18 who are in apprenticeship and student-learner programs. Go to [www.dir.ca.gov/DLSE](http://www.dir.ca.gov/DLSE) and click on "child labor" for more information.

## In California, workers under 18 MAY NOT:

- » Operate, clean or repair power-driven machinery:
  - meat slicers
  - bakery machines (including dough mixers)
  - box crushers/compactors
  - woodworking machines
  - punches
  - hoists
  - forklifts
  - circular saws
  - hand saws
  - guillotine shears
- » Drive anything with a motor on public streets as part of the job, or work as an outside helper on a motor vehicle. (17-year-olds may drive, but only in very limited circumstances that the law allows.)
- » Handle, serve, or sell alcoholic beverages
- » Be exposed to radioactive substances or ionizing radiation
- » Work in:
  - wrecking or demolition
  - excavation
  - logging or sawmills
  - roofing, or work that involves going on or near the roof
  - manufacturing brick or tile
  - manufacturing or storage of explosives
  - mining
  - meat packing or processing
- » Mix, load, or apply Category I pesticides

## Also, workers under 16 MAY NOT:

- » Work in building or construction
- » Work in manufacturing or food processing
- » Bake or cook (except on electric or gas grills that do not have open flames, or with deep fat fryers that automatically lower and raise the baskets)
- » Go from house to house to sell things or do "sign-waving" (unless they are directly in front of the the place where they work)
- » Do dry cleaning or work in a commercial laundry
- » Work on a ladder or scaffold
- » Work in a freezer or meat cooler
- » Load or unload trucks, railroad cars, or conveyors
- » Work in a warehouse (except as a clerical)
- » Dispense gas or oil
- » Clean, wash, or polish cars
- » Use power-driven lawn mowers

# What Hours May Teens Work in California?

This table shows the hours teens may work in California. (Some school districts may have more restrictive regulations. Also, there are some exceptions for teens in Work Experience Education programs.)

WORK HOURS FOR TEENS		
	Ages 14-15:	Ages 16-17:
<b>Work Hours when there is school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» 7 am–7 pm, from Labor Day–June 1</li> <li>» Not during school hours</li> <li>» 7 am–9 pm, from June 1–Labor Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» 5 am–10 pm when there is school the next day</li> <li>» 5 am–12:30 am when there is no school the next day</li> </ul>
<b>Maximum Hours When School is In Session</b>	18 hours a week, but not over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» 3 hours a day on school days</li> <li>» 8 hours a day Saturday – Sunday and holidays</li> </ul>	48 hours a week, but not over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» 4 hours a day Monday–Thursday</li> <li>» 8 hours a day Friday–Sunday and holidays</li> </ul>
<b>Maximum Hours When School is Not in Session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» 40 hours a week</li> <li>» 8 hours a day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» 48 hours a week</li> <li>» 8 hours a day</li> </ul>

“Having young people at work gives us a chance to remind everybody that safety is important. We have really focused on our safety program. We haven’t had any serious injuries this year, and we’re saving over 25% in workers’ comp costs!”

–Michele Clark-Clough  
The Youth Employment Partnership



## Ideas From Employers

- » A California zoo assigns each new teen worker a “buddy” or mentor. Sometimes this is a more experienced teen worker. This mentor answers questions, helps give hands-on training, and offers safety tips.
- » At one chain of convenience stores, young employees are issued different colored smocks, based on age. This lets the supervisors know at a glance who is not allowed to operate the electric meat slicer.
- » An employer in the fast-food industry, with 8,000 young workers in five states, developed a computerized tracking system to ensure that teens aren’t scheduled for too many hours during school weeks.

# Compliance Checklist for Employers

This checklist can help you determine whether you are in compliance with the most important California child labor laws and Cal/OSHA regulations. The list is not complete, and is not intended as legal advice. Other sections of this factsheet give more information on the issues covered here.

## Labor Laws

- Employees under 18 do not work too many hours, too late, or too early.
- Employees under 18 do not do any hazardous work prohibited by child labor laws.
- Employees under 16 do not do any of the tasks prohibited for their age group.
- All employees under 18 have valid work permits which were issued by their school district of office (or other agencies designated by the district). (Not required for those who have graduated from high school or passed the equivalency exam.)
- All employees (including teens) are covered by workers’ compensation.
- Employees (including teens) receive at least the California minimum wage—as of January 1, 2024, set at \$16.00/hour.** To check for updated rates after 2023, visit [https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/faq\\_minimumwage.htm](https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/faq_minimumwage.htm). In some cases, employers can pay less than minimum wage during the first 160 hours of work, if the worker has no previous similar experience.

## Cal/OSHA Regulations

- There is an Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP) for your workplace. This includes:
  - Information and training for all workers about possible hazards, given in a language they understand.
  - A system for workers to report hazards without fear of being fired or punished.
  - A system for inspecting the workplace and correcting hazards promptly.
  - Training for supervisors.
- Employees are provided with all safety and protective equipment.
- Requirements of the Hazard Communication standard are met:
  - All containers of toxic materials are labeled with the chemical name, hazard warnings, and name and address of the manufacturer.
  - Employees are trained about chemicals they work with, potential hazards, and protective measures.
  - Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) for all chemicals in your worksite are easily accessible to workers.

**Note: Cal/OSHA also has many specific regulations covering electrical hazards, fire safety, fall protection, machinery, etc. See [Resources for Information and Help](#) in this factsheet.**



“Most teens are enthusiastic and eager to learn. They make my work a lot of fun. But teens can be injured on the job when they don’t receive adequate safety training and supervision.”

—Scott Silver, Operations Manager,  
Oakland Zoo

## Resources for Information and Help

### About health and safety:

- » **Cal/OSHA Consultation Service, California Dept. of Industrial Relations.** Provides free, confidential advice and assistance to employers. (800) 963-9424
- » **Cal/OSHA Web Site** (Division of Occupational Safety and Health, California Dept. of Industrial Relations). Has publications and searchable Cal/OSHA standards. [www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH](http://www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH)
- » **California Chamber of Commerce.** Has publications to assist with compliance. (800) 331-8877 [www.calchamber.com/store](http://www.calchamber.com/store)
- » **Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP), U.C. Berkeley.** Has publications for small business and a Young Workers Project. (510) 642-5507 [www.lohp.org](http://www.lohp.org)
- » **Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program (LOSH), UCLA.** Has publications for small business. (310) 794-5964 [www.losh.ucla.edu](http://www.losh.ucla.edu)

- » **Occupational Health Branch.** California Dept. of Health Services. Offers publications and consultation on specific hazards. (510) 620-5757 [www.dhs.ca.gov/ohb](http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ohb)

### About wages or child labor laws:

- » **Labor Commissioner’s Office.** California Dept. of Industrial Relations. Enforces state labor laws. (415) 703-5300 [www.dir.ca.gov/DLSE](http://www.dir.ca.gov/DLSE)
- » **Wage and Hour Division,** U.S. Dept. of Labor. Enforces federal labor laws. (866) 4-USWAGE (487-9243) [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov)

### About workers’ compensation:

- » **Division of Workers’ Compensation,** California Dept. of Industrial Relations. Has information and Assistance offices statewide. (800) 736-7401 [www.dir.ca.gov/DWC](http://www.dir.ca.gov/DWC)

## How Can I Hire Youth From a Training Program?

- » **Work Experience Education, Work-based Learning, or Academy Programs.** Call your high school or school district office. Ask for the Work Experience Educator or work-based learning coordinator.
- » **Regional Occupational Programs or Centers (ROP/C).** Call your high school or school district office and ask about trade-specific programs in your area.
- » **Apprenticeship Programs.** Call the Division of Apprenticeship Standards Headquarters at (415) 703-4920 to find out about apprenticeship programs for specific trades in your area.
- » **Local job training and placement programs.** Call your local Workforce Investment Board (WIB). Ask about community training programs.



**LOHP**  
LABOR OCCUPATIONAL  
HEALTH PROGRAM

[youngworkers.org](http://youngworkers.org)