

HIRING TEENS?

Legal & Safety Information for Employers



Work Permits

Ensure teen employees have valid work permits.

All employees under 18 must have valid work permits (these are typically issued by schools or school district offices).

Protection

Protect teens from dangerous work.

Teens are not allowed to work in the most dangerous industries (like demolition and roofing). In California, workers under 18 may only drive cars under limited circumstances, cannot drive forklifts or use heavy machinery or powered tools (like circular saws or box-crushers). Teens are also not allowed to prepare, sell or serve alcohol. There are additional protections for 14- and 15-year-olds. If a teen is part of a work experience program, there are fewer restrictions.

Minimum Wage

Pay the minimum wage.

Young workers must receive the minimum wage: \$16.90/hour in California in 2026 (some cities and counties have higher minimum wages). You can check for the most updated information at the California Labor Commissioner's Office.

Injury Prevention

Update your Injury and Illness Prevention Plan.

In California, employers are required to create and maintain an Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP) that specifies how the employer will protect workers against hazards. *The IIPP is the most commonly cited Cal/OSHA violation, as many employers overlook this requirement.*

Training & PPE

Provide adequate training and personal protective equipment.

Give teens clear instructions for each task, especially unfamiliar ones. Provide hands-on training on the correct use of equipment and show how to take safety precautions and respond in case of an accident or emergency.

Encourage teens to ask questions. Observe teens while they work and correct any mistakes. Retrain them regularly. Maintain a regular supply of personal protective equipment and ensure teens know how to use it.



Legal Work Hours for Teens in California

Because teens are encouraged to focus on school, there are child labor laws to protect teens from working too late, too early, or too long.

	<i>Ages 14-15</i>	<i>Ages 16-17</i>
<i>When school is in session:</i>	<p>Allowed to work before or after school between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.</p> <p>Allowed to work up to 18 hours per week, but no more than three hours per day on school days and no more than eight hours per day on Saturday, Sunday or holidays.</p>	<p>Allowed to work before or after school Monday through Thursday between 5 a.m. and 10 p.m.</p> <p>Allowed to work between 5 a.m. and 12:30 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays outside of school hours.</p> <p>Allowed to work up to 48 hours per week, but not over four hours per day on school days or eight hours per day on weekends or holidays.</p>
<i>When school is not in session (June 1 to Labor Day):</i>	<p>Allowed to work between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m.</p> <p>Allowed to work up to 40 hours per week and up to eight hours per day.</p>	<p>Allowed to work up to 40 hours per week and up to eight hours per day.</p>

There are some exceptions for teens in work experience programs.

It is illegal for workers under 18 to:

- Operate, clean or repair power-driven machinery.
- Drive a car or truck as the main part of their job.
- Handle, serve, or sell alcohol.
- Work in wrecking or demolition, roofing, or logging.
- Work with pesticides.

It is illegal for workers under 16 to:

- Work in building or construction.
- Work in manufacturing or food processing.
- Bake or cook.
- Work in dry cleaning or laundry.
- Work on a ladder or scaffold.
- Work in a freezer or meat cooler.
- Load or unload trucks.
- Work in a warehouse.
- Dispense gas or oil.
- Clean, wash, or polish cars.
- Use power-driven lawn mowers.

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