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# FACTS

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

## Young worker safety – advice for parents

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Are your children safe at work? Are you sure that someone is looking out for them? This factsheet will help you understand what health and safety arrangements employers should provide for young people at work and help you talk to your children about preventing workplace injuries.

Every year, millions of school and college students work in part-time or summer jobs to earn some spending money. Many will take part in organised work experience training. Others start fulltime work for the first time. Early work experiences can be rewarding for young people - providing great opportunities to learn important job skills. The experience should be a safe and healthy one as well.

When young people enter full time work for the first time, this should also be a safe and productive start, so they work to live. Unfortunately this is not always the case. According to European statistics, the work injury rate for young people aged 18-24 years is 50% higher than for any other age group of workers (1).

A 17 year-old lost part of a finger only one hour after starting her holiday job. Her fingers were crushed in a machine at the bakery where she worked.

An 18 year-old apprentice mechanic died 4 days after being engulfed in flames; he was helping his manager empty a mixture of petrol and diesel into a waste tank when the petrol exploded.

Workers are covered by health and safety regulations that require employers to assess workplace hazards and provide the necessary preventive measures, instruction and training. Employers should

take particular care over young people and new starters because of their lack of training, experience and awareness.

Under-18s are covered by additional requirements because they lack experience and may lack physical and mental maturity. There are also restrictions on their working hours. Employers

### Safety of young people under 18 - what must employers do?

There are national regulations in place, arising out of European regulations, on the protection of young people at work (2). They take account of the particular risk to young people because of their lack of experience, awareness and maturity.

These Regulations require employers to:

- take account of young people's lack of experience, awareness about occupational risks to their health and safety, physical and mental immaturity etc. when they assess risks to their health and safety;
- make the risk assessment BEFORE the young person begins work;
- take account of the risk assessment when determining whether or not the young person is prohibited from doing certain work;
- inform parents or legal guardians of school-age children of the outcome of the risk assessment and the control measures introduced to reduce those risks.

As a general rule *under 18s* must NOT be allowed to do work which:

- exceeds their physical or mental capacities;
- exposes them to substances which are toxic or cause cancer;
- exposes them to radiation;
- involves extreme heat, noise or vibration;
- involves risks that they are unlikely to recognise or avoid because of their lack of experience or training or their insufficient attention to safety.

Factsheet 'Protection for young people in the workplace' provides more details of task, age and hours restrictions, special exceptions for vocational training, and the strict limitations on the working of children under the minimum school leaving age in those Member States where it is permitted. Check national legislation for the precise requirements.

(1) Eurostat, Work and Health in the EU - a statistical portrait 1994-2002.

(2) Council Directive 94/33/EC on the protection of young people at work sets **minimum** requirements, and the law in your Member State may be stricter, for example regarding the minimum ages that children may work and prohibited tasks.

who offer employment experience placements to young people should provide them with at least the same health and safety protection as they would give their own employees.

Where a young person is under the minimum school leaving age the employer must inform parents or legal guardians about risks and control measures. This should be done before work starts.

### What parents can do

Accidents and deaths can and do happen to young people, despite most workplace accidents being preventable. Work can also compromise a young person's health for the future. For example, if they are exposed to workplace products that cause allergies, loud noise or work in awkward or strained postures. So the importance of health and safety prevention and training cannot be underestimated.

Here are some steps you can take to help your children:

- Talk to your children about their holiday or weekend job work or work training placement choices. What types of jobs and workplace options are there?
- Find out about the nature of their tasks.
- Ask them what training they have received and how they are supervised. Tell them not to be afraid to ask for training and assistance before operating equipment or doing any new job or task.
- Regularly talk to them about their job. Encourage them to talk to you about any problems with work or health and safety concerns.
- Talk to their employer about health and safety arrangements and training.
- Alert your children to the dangers of working alone or at night.
- Encourage your children to ask questions, seek help if they are uncertain about work practices or activities and to report any hazard, injury or ill health right away, no matter how small.

- Encourage them to talk to the workplace doctor, nurse or other occupational health staff, (if the workplace has them). And if they visit the family doctor with a complaint, to tell the doctor what work they do.
- Point out that they can also approach the worker safety representative or trade union representative if there is one, about safety problems.
- Talk to your children about your own health and safety experiences, in current or previous jobs, what happened, what was done, what you would have done if you had known better.
- Encourage your children's school or college to cover risk awareness activities for younger children, and work-related health and safety for older students.
- Speak to other parents about the issue.
- Find out what your own workplace does to protect young workers.
- Encourage your children to find out more for themselves about health and safety aspects of their job, for example, from your national authority or through the links to resources on the Agency website. Find out more yourself!

Young workers, like all workers, have three important health and safety **rights**:

1. Right to know
2. Right to participate
3. Right to refuse unsafe work

They also have **responsibilities**, including to:

1. Work safely
2. Report hazards
3. Use or wear protective devices

Eagerness to please or uncertainty may inhibit them. Talk to them about their rights, the need to work safely at all times, and to always follow safety procedures to protect themselves and their work mates – work is not a game.

### Further information and resources at

<http://ew2006.osha.eu.int> Sources include your national health and safety authority, trade unions and trade associations.

**More information** on guidance for Great Britain available from <http://www.hse.gov.uk>

**More information** on legislation for Ireland is available at: <http://www.hsa.ie>

**More information** on legislation for Malta is available at: <http://mt.osha.eu.int/legislation>

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