

HR INSIGHTS

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Youth Workers

Hiring youth workers—many times to fill seasonal positions—can be an integral component to your organization’s hiring plan. Early work experience can also be a great opportunity for teenagers to learn important skills.

To promote positive and safe work experiences, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has a series of regulations relating to the employment of minors. These provisions are designed to protect young workers by restricting the types of jobs that they perform and the number of hours they work. It is important to follow all federal, state and local laws regarding the employment of minors to ensure that your business remains compliant and protects its reputation.

Listed below are some age-specific workforce regulations, as presented by the DOL’s YouthRules! initiative.

Rules for Workers Under 14 Years of Age

In general, youth workers who are under the age of 14 are limited on what type of jobs they can do. Workers who are under 14 years of age are only permitted to do the following jobs:

- Deliver newspapers to customers
- Babysit on a casual basis
- Work as an actor or actress in movies, TV, radio or theater
- Work as a homemaker gathering evergreens or making evergreen wreaths
- Work for a business owned entirely by their parents as long as it is not in mining, manufacturing or any of the [17 hazardous occupations](#)

There are different rules in place for minors in this age group who work in [agriculture](#). [States](#) also have specific rules for youth workers under 14 years old, and employers must follow both.

Rules for Workers 14 to 15 Years of Age

Similar to workers under 14 years of age, youth workers who are 14 to 15 years old are limited on what types of jobs they can do and what hours they can work.

It is important to follow all federal, state and local laws regarding the employment of minors to ensure that your business remains compliant and protects its reputation.

Job Restrictions

In general, youth workers within this age range are only permitted to do [certain jobs](#), which include the following:

- Work an approved [retail position](#)
- Work an intellectual or creative position, such as computer programming, teaching, tutoring, singing, acting or playing an instrument
- Run errands or complete delivery work by foot, bicycle and public transportation
- Complete cleanup and yard work that does not include using power-driven mowers, cutters, trimmers, edgers or similar equipment
- Work in connection with cars and trucks, such as dispensing gasoline or oil and washing or hand polishing
- Work in a kitchen or the [food service](#) industry reheating food, washing dishes, cleaning equipment or doing some limited [cooking](#)
- Clean vegetables and fruits, wrap, seal, label, weigh pricing and stock items as long as these tasks are performed in areas separate from a freezer or meat cooler
- Load or unload objects for use at a worksite including rakes, hand-held clippers and shovels

Additionally, 14- and 15-year-olds who meet certain requirements can perform limited tasks in [sawmills and woodshops](#), and 15-year-olds who meet certain requirements can perform [lifeguard](#) duties at traditional swimming pools and water [amusement parks](#).

If an occupation is not specifically permitted, it is prohibited for youth between the ages of 14 and 15.

Working Hour Restrictions

Workers who are 14 to 15 years old are also limited in what hours they can work. Generally, all work must be performed outside of school hours. In general, youth in this age range may not work the following:

- More than three hours on a school day, including Friday
- More than 18 hours per week when school is in session
- More than eight hours per day when school is not in session
- More than 40 hours per week when school is not in session
- Before 7 a.m. or after 7 p.m. on any day, except from June 1 through Labor Day, when nighttime work hours are extended to 9 p.m.

A "school day" or "school week" for youth workers who are home schooled, attend private school or no school, is any day or week when the public school where they live while employed is in session. There are some exceptions to the hours standards for 14- and 15-year-olds if they have graduated from high school, are excused from compulsory school attendance, or are enrolled in an approved work experience, career exploration program or work-study program. Click [here](#) for more information on hours restrictions for youth workers in this age group.

Wage Requirements

In most cases, 14- and 15-year-olds must be paid the federal minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour. Minimum wage eligibility varies depending on the type of job and location.

Additionally, workers who are younger than 20 and eligible for the minimum wage may be paid as little as \$4.25 per hour for the first 90 consecutive calendar days of their employment.

There are different rules for 14- and 15-year-olds working in [agriculture](#) and [states](#) also have rules, and employers must follow both.

Rules for Workers 16 to 17 Years of Age

Although there are no federal rules limiting the hours 16- and 17-year-olds may work, there are restrictions on the types of jobs they can do.

Job Restrictions

Workers who are 16 to 17 years old may work any job that has not been declared hazardous by the Secretary of Labor. Visit the YouthRules! [webpage](#) on workplace hazards for more information on banned occupations for workers under 18 years of age.

Wage Requirements

In most cases, 16- and 17-year olds must be paid the federal minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour. Minimum wage eligibility varies depending on the type of job and location. Additionally, workers who are younger than 20 and eligible for the minimum wage may be paid as little as \$4.25 per hour for the first 90 consecutive calendar days of their employment.

There are different rules for 16- and 17-year-olds working in [agriculture](#) and [states](#) also have rules, and employers must follow both.

Rules for Workers 18 Years of Age and Older

Once a youth worker turns 18, most youth work rules no longer apply. There are no limits to the number of hours or types of jobs an 18-year-old can work.

Wage Requirements

In most cases, 18-year-olds must be paid the federal minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour. Minimum wage eligibility varies depending on the type of job and location. Additionally, workers who are younger than 20 and eligible for the minimum wage may be paid as little as \$4.25 per hour for the first 90 consecutive calendar days of their employment. [States](#) also have rules, and employers must follow both.

Summary

Federal and state rules regarding young workers strike a balance between ensuring sufficient time for educational opportunities and allowing appropriate work experiences. Complying with these rules ensures that your organization is providing a safe work environment for teen workers to obtain appropriate early work experience.

Source: YouthRules! and the DOL