

# Guide to Child Labor Laws in the United States

Federal and state laws set special standards for children who work in the United States. The purpose of these standards is to ensure children's safety, welfare and access to education.

Child labor laws protect both U.S. and foreign children working in the United States, including foreign child workers without a valid permit.

## What is child labor?

Child labor is the work performed by a person under 18 years of age.

A child is also called a "minor."

## At what age can I start to work in the United States?

Under federal law, a child who is at least 16 years of age can work in any job that is not hazardous for minors.

There are different rules and age restrictions for minors who do farm work.

## Is the federal minimum age requirement the only age law I need to know?

No. Many states have different child labor laws that both minors and employers must follow.

For more information, contact the state labor department in the state where you are working.

## How much money do minors earn per hour?

It depends on the situation. For information on pay provisions for minors, see [Guide to Minimum Employment Standards, Pay Deductions and Unemployment Compensation in the United States](#).



### Wage and Hour Division

The Wage and Hour Division provides information on child labor laws. It also handles complaints about violations of child labor laws.

You can call the Wage and Hour Division toll free at 1-866-4USWAGE (1-866-487-9243) or write to:

Wage and Hour Division  
Employment Standards Administration  
200 Constitution Ave. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20210

### **Hazardous jobs**

Minors cannot work in jobs that are hazardous under the law.

Jobs that are hazardous to minors include making explosives, roofing jobs, using power-driven saws, and driving.

For more information on jobs that are hazardous to minors, contact the Wage and Hour Division.

### **Apprenticeship and student learner programs**

Minors can work in some jobs that are hazardous to workers under 18 years of age, if they join an “apprenticeship” or “student learner” program.

Apprenticeship and student learner programs are special programs that teach young workers how to do a job.

For more information, contact the Wage and Hour Division at 1-866-487-9243.

### **What do I need to be able to work?**

Some states require that minors obtain an age certificate.

An age certificate is written proof that shows the age of a minor.

### **Can I work if I am younger than 16?**

Maybe. Minors who are 14 or 15 years of age can only work in:

- school-run work programs;
- career exploration programs;
- retail jobs;
- food and gas service jobs.

### **Can workers 14 or 15 years of age work as many days and hours as they want?**

No. Many restrictions limit the days and hours that minors 14 and 15 years of age may work.

They cannot work:

- during school hours, unless as a part of a school work program;
- more than three hours on school days;
- more than eight hours on nonschool days;
- more than 18 hours a week during a school week;
- more than 40 hours a week during a nonschool week;
- between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., except from June 1 to Labor Day, when hours extend to 9 p.m.;
- more than 23 hours during a school week in a school-run program.



### **Age certificates and employer responsibilities**

Employers must inquire into the age of a minor and enforce age restrictions on work.

Employers can avoid breaking child labor laws by keeping an unexpired “age certificate” on file for each youth.

### **Federal and state agencies issue age certificates.**

To get an age certificate, minors need one of the following:

- a birth certificate or equivalent;
- a record of baptism or equivalent;
- a bona fide biblical record ;
- a school record or equivalent;
- other documents showing age (passport, U.S. arrival certificate, etc.) in existence at least one year prior to being used as proof.

To get an age certificate, contact your local state employment agency.

### **Hazardous jobs for children 14 and 15 years of age**

Fourteen and 15-year-olds cannot work in many jobs.

Restricted jobs include:

- jobs hazardous to minors;
- manufacturing, mining, or processing;
- operating a hoisting apparatus or power-driven machinery (other than office machines);
- using or helping on motor vehicles;
- public messenger service;
- transportation of persons or property;
- warehousing, storage or construction;
- communications and public utilities.

### **Can a minor under the age of 12 work on a farm?**

Yes. Minors under 12 years of age can work on farms, but only on farms owned and operated by their parents. Minors may also work on a farm not subject to the federal minimum wage if they have written permission from their parents.



### **Are children working on a farm subject to the same child labor laws as other children?**

No. There are different child labor rules for minors who work on a farm.

### **What is farm work?**

Farm work is all farming and some farming-related activities.

### **Can a minor who is under 16 years of age work on a farm?**

Yes. Minors between 14 and 16 years of age can work on a farm during nonschool hours, but not during school hours.

### **Can a minor 12 or 13 years old work on a farm?**

Yes. Workers 12 and 13 years old can work on a farm, but only on a farm where their parents work, or on another farm if they have written permission from their parents.

### **Dangerous farm jobs**

There are many farm jobs that children cannot do because the jobs are very dangerous.

Workers must be at least 16 years of age to work in farm jobs that are hazardous according to the law.

Hazardous agricultural jobs include:

- operating a tractor with more than 20 PTO horsepower;
- using powered circular, band, and chain saws;
- working on a ladder or scaffold higher than 20 feet off the ground;
- riding on a tractor as a passenger or helper;
- handling or applying poisonous chemicals, including pesticides.

For more information on hazardous farm jobs, please contact the Wage and Hour Division at 1-866-487-9243.



Commission for Labor Cooperation