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Adolescents on the Job

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistic about 3 out of every 4 high school students will have worked in an employee type job by the time they reach their senior year. As we get closer to the end of the school year, there will be many teenagers seeking summer jobs, if they are not already working. This can be valuable in helping them to become more responsible and in learning new skills. However, many teens start working without knowing the laws that protect them or how to stay safe on the job. As a parent it is very important that you familiarize yourself with the labor laws that cover teens, as well as talk to your teen about how to avoid injuries that could affect them the rest of their lives.

A study conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health estimated that approximately 146,000 adolescents sustain work related injuries and illnesses each year. In 2009 about 1.9 million adolescents between the ages of 15-17 worked in the US and a significant amount of these teenagers work in the fast food or restaurant industry. By age 17, about 55 percent of teens working in fast food have suffered some type of job related injury. Most of these injuries are burn injuries from hot grease or other hot liquids and fall injuries due to wet or greasy floors.

It is the employer's responsibility to protect employees and provide a safe workplace and the teen worker should follow the safe work practices implemented by their employer. Employers are also responsible for making sure teen workers are properly trained on the use of any equipment or machinery they will be working with in order to operate it safely. Employers are also required to provide any personal protective equipment needed to perform the job.

The type of work teens often perform in restaurants is serving or preparing food. Serving food and bussing tables, especially while assuming awkward postures, may lead to back, neck, and shoulder strains and sprains. Burns can occur while teens are serving or preparing hot foods or drinks or while they are operating machinery that makes hot drinks such as coffee, tea, or espresso or that cooks food such as grills, ovens, or deep fryers. Carrying hot plates or plates that have been placed under heat lamps or reaching over candles placed on tables can also cause burns. Walking and working surfaces in restaurants can often be wet or greasy which can lead to slips and falls.

Many of these hazards can be avoided or minimized with the proper safety precautions in place. Parents should take an active role in the employment decisions their teenager makes. Get to know where your child has chosen to work and research the safety procedures required for the type of job they perform. Go over the possible job hazards your child might encounter with them and what the safety measures are to

mitigate those hazards. An excellent site to find pertinent safety information specifically for youth is <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/>.

Working a part time job while in high school can be a great learning experience for teenagers. By having a sense of safety awareness and practicing good safety precautions it can remain a positive one.