

In the Workplace: FAQs

- [What is the minimum age for working in Ontario?](#)
- [Is there an acceptable temperature range for workplaces, either hot or cold?](#)
- [How much a weight can a worker be legally required to lift?](#)
- [Does Ontario have a “working alone” regulation?](#)
- [What can a worker do about someone smoking at work?](#)
- [What are the legal requirements for Personal Protective Equipment?](#)
- [Are there requirements for workplace first aid?](#)
- [What can a worker do about unsafe conditions at work?](#)
- [What should a worker do if injured at work?](#)
- [What are a Joint Health and Safety Committees and when is it required?](#)
- [What is certification training and who provides it?](#)
- [What is the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System?](#)

What is the minimum age for working in Ontario?

The minimum age for working in Ontario is 14 years for most types of work. However, 14-, 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds are not to be employed during school hours unless they have been excused from school attendance under provisions of Ontario's [Education Act](#). Some regulations specify higher minimum ages for certain types of work, as follows:

- Underground Mines: 18 years
- Construction: 16 years
- Window Cleaning: 18 years
- Logging Operations: 16 years
- Factories or Repair Shops: 15 years
- Stores, Offices or Arenas: 14 years.

In a restaurant, the food preparation area would be considered a factory, with a minimum age of 15 years, whereas the cash register would be a shop - minimum age: 14 years. Special programs for young workers are described in a section of the ministry's web site devoted to issues of concern to students and young workers.

[Return to top](#)

Is there an acceptable temperature range for workplaces, either hot or cold?

In a health care facility or an industrial establishment, such as a factory, store, shop or office, the [regulations](#) set a minimum temperature of 18 °C, subject to some exemptions for things like work outdoors or in freezers. The construction projects regulation specifies a minimum of 27 °C for underground change rooms [Section 260 (3) (d)], a maximum of 38 °C for work chambers [Section 384], and where work is done in compressed air, the provision of a medical lock with a minimum of 18 °C [Section 357] and maximum of 27 °C [Section 380]. There are no set minimum or maximum temperatures for other workplaces. Nevertheless, because either extreme heat or cold may be a hazard, temperature is a legitimate issue in determining workplace safety. A particular concern is heat stress.

[Return to top](#)

How much weight can a worker be legally required to lift?

Although it is well known that lifting can be a hazard for workers, there is no "magic number" in Ontario's health and safety regulations describing a safe weight for lifting. The maximum acceptable amount of weight a worker can handle depends on the worker's build and fitness, the height lifted from and to, the distance from the body, the frequency of lifting, and other factors.

[Section 25\(2\)\(h\)](#) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), which requires an employer to do what is reasonable in the circumstances to protect a worker, applies to lifting operations. There are general precautions that can reduce lifting hazards, and an ergonomic analysis can be performed to determine what is likely to be safe for a specific person performing a particular task. Ergonomics is concerned with how the human body is affected by the tasks it performs, including lifting.

[Return to top](#)

Does Ontario have a "working alone" regulation?

Ontario does not have a specific regulation concerned with "working alone" although the [Regulation for Industrial Establishments](#) specifies a minimum number of workers for some hazardous work such as working on live electrical conductors. Instead, reliance is placed on the employer's general duty to take all reasonable precautions for the health and safety of the worker, as specified in OHSA Section 25(2)(h).

[Return to top](#)

What can a worker do about someone smoking at work?

Local public health units will carry out inspections and investigate complaints in workplaces to enforce the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. The act prohibits smoking in enclosed workplaces in

Ontario in order to protect workers from exposure to second hand smoke. The act repeals the Smoking in the Workplace Act, which was enforced by the Ministry of Labour.

For more information on the [Smoke-Free Ontario Act](#), how it affects your workplace and who to contact about having it enforced, please visit the [Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website](#).

[Return to top](#)

What are the legal requirements for personal protective equipment?

Although there is no general requirement in the Ministry of Labour's legislation for an employer to provide workers with personal protective equipment (PPE), an employer has a general duty, under OHS Act Section 25(2)(h) to "take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances" to protect workers. In practical terms, this means PPE should be provided to workers wherever there are health (or safety) risks that cannot be adequately controlled in other ways. PPE can reduce or prevent a worker's exposure to a health hazard in the workplace and can include respirators, hearing protectors, protective clothing, footwear and face and eye shields.

PPE is required in specific situations and dealt with in regulations made under OHS Act. Section 7 of the Regulation respecting the [Control of Exposure to Biological or Chemical Agents](#) requires respirators to be provided when engineering controls are not practical. Section 2 of the [Noise Regulation](#), O. Reg. 381/15 sets out the requirements for protecting workers from exposure to hazardous sound levels.

[Return to top](#)

Are there workplace requirements for first aid?

Workplaces that are covered by the [Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997](#) are required by regulation to have adequate first aid equipment, facilities, and trained people. The [Workplace Safety and Insurance Board](#) (WSIB) has published a [first aid brochure](#) that includes the regulation and a list of recognized organizations that provide first aid training. Additional first aid requirements for particular work situations are specified in the Ministry's Regulations for [Construction Projects](#) [Sections 261 to 263, 355, 361 and 362] and for [Mines and Mining Plants](#) [Section 281.1 and the Schedule].

[Return to top](#)

What can a worker do about unsafe conditions at work?

Health and safety concerns should first be brought to the attention of the employer or supervisor. If nothing is done, it can be taken to the worker's health and safety representative or [Joint Health and Safety Committee](#). If the situation is not corrected, it can be reported to the nearest office of the Ministry of Labour. Workers also have the right to refuse unsafe work. OHS Act [Section 43](#) outlines the procedure that must be followed, and this process should be understood before a refusal is initiated. More information can be obtained from [local ministry offices](#).

More about [unsafe conditions at work](#).

[Return to top](#)

What should a worker do if injured at work?

Obviously, an injured worker's first priority should be to get proper medical attention. Ensuring that necessary medical treatment is provided is the responsibility of the employer. It may take the form of first aid from a trained co-worker or require transportation to and treatment at a hospital.

The injury-causing incident must also be reported to the worker's supervisor or employer, so that the employer's responsibilities under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act can be met. One of these responsibilities is completion of a Workplace Safety and Insurance Board form ([WSIB Form 7](#)), which must be submitted to the WSIB before workers, who are eligible, can receive workplace safety insurance (formerly known as workers' compensation). More information on workplace safety insurance is available from the [WSIB](#), the [Office of the Worker Adviser](#), and the [Office of the Employer Adviser](#).

[Return to top](#)

What are Joint Health and Safety Committees, and where are they required?

A Joint Health and Safety Committees(JHSC) is a committee of at least two persons, who represent the workers and the employer at a workplace. Their primary role is to identify workplace health and safety problems and bring them to the attention of the employer. Section 9 of OHS Act requires a JHSC at:

- Any workplace that regularly employs 20 or more workers;
- Construction projects expected to last three months or longer with 20 or more workers;
- Any workplace (other than a construction project) to which a designated substance regulation applies;
- Any workplace where an order has been issued under OHS Act section 33, dealing with toxic substances; and
- Any workplace where the Minister of Labour orders one to be established.

Workplaces with more than five but less than 20 workers are not usually required to have a JHSC. Instead, workers must select a person from among themselves to be a health and safety representative. The Ministry of Labour has published

[A Guide for Joint Health and Safety Committees and Representatives in the Workplace](#).

[Return to top](#)

What is certification training and who provides it?

[OHSA](#) Subsection 9(12) requires most workplaces with 20 or more workers to have at least one worker and one management person serve as certified members of a workplace Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC). This certification involves training in health and safety law, and the identification, assessment and control of [hazards](#).

Standards for this training are set by the Ministry of Labour and the ministry also certifies JHSC members who complete approved training programs. Certification training is delivered by a number of approved providers. The programs vary in length and cost.

[Return to top](#)

What is the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)?

WHMIS is a Canada-wide system designed to give employers and workers information about hazardous materials used in the workplace. It has been implemented by a combination of federal and provincial legislation. The main purpose of the federal WHMIS legislation is to require suppliers of hazardous materials used in the workplace to provide health and safety information about their products as a condition of sale.

[The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, Regulation 860](#), requires employers to obtain health and safety information about hazardous materials in their workplaces and to pass it on to their workers. There are three ways in which the information is to be provided:

- Labels on the containers of hazardous materials
- Safety data sheets (SDSs) to supplement the label with detailed hazard and precautionary information, and
- Worker education programs.

The supplier of the hazardous material provides the labels and SDS to the employer. The employer passes the information on to the worker and provides education programs. The Ministry of Labour has published a [WHMIS Guide](#) which is available from [ServiceOntario Publications](#).