

Work-Related Injuries to Teens in Massachusetts Surveillance Update: 1993-1999

Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance and Intervention Project

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Introduction

Work is part of everyday life for millions of teens throughout the United States. According to official employment statistics for 1999, on average, 31% of U.S. 16-17-year-olds worked at any given point during the year. In Massachusetts, this percentage was even higher: 48% - more than 79,000 16-17-year-olds - were employed at any given point during 1999. Moreover, many younger teens also work. Several student surveys indicate that greater than 80% of adolescents have held jobs by the time they finish high school. While work can have important benefits for youth, it may also pose health and safety risks. Each year across the United States, hundreds of thousands of teens are injured on the job and at least 70 are killed. It also appears that teens have a higher rate of occupational injury per hour worked than adults. Information about where and how youth are injured at work is essential for targeting injury prevention efforts.

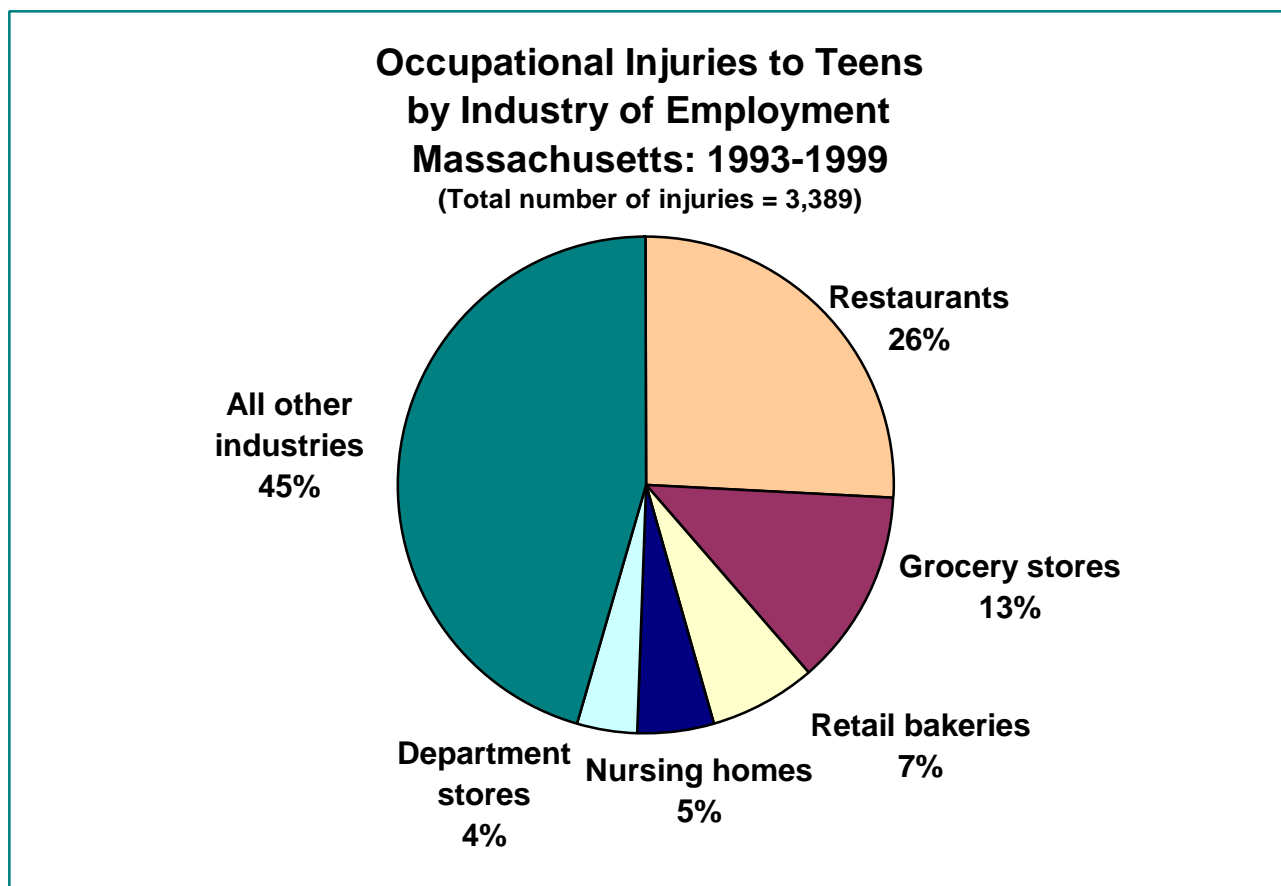
The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (MDPH) *Teens at Work: Surveillance and Prevention Project* collects data about work-related injuries to teens younger than 18 years old. This information is used to aid in the planning of prevention activities across Massachusetts. Funded in part by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, this is the only project of its kind in the United States. Since 1992, Massachusetts public health code has mandated that physicians and hospitals report cases of adolescent work-related injuries to the MDPH. Workers' compensation claims are also used to identify cases. Cases identified through workers' compensation claims are limited to workers with injuries resulting in five or more lost workdays. In addition, not all hospital emergency departments consistently report injuries to the surveillance system (fourteen hospitals regularly file reports). Consequently, the actual number of work-related injuries to teens requiring medical treatment is believed to be much higher than the number of cases identified by the surveillance system. Nevertheless, *Teens at Work* findings provide important information about the occupations, industries, and workplaces where young workers are injured.

The *Teens at Work Project* also conducts follow-up telephone interviews with more than 100 injured teens each year to obtain additional information about their injuries and work experiences. For example, teens are asked about the tasks and tools that may have contributed to their injuries, the severity of their injuries, and workplace health and safety training. In select cases, research-oriented work site investigations are carried out to collect more detailed information about the work environment and circumstances of the teen's injury. These investigations are also used in the planning of injury prevention efforts.

Overview

The *Teens at Work Project* identified 3,389 work-related injuries to Massachusetts teens sustained between July 1993 and June 1999 – over 500 injuries per year. More than half of the injuries occurred in just five industries (**Figure A**). Restaurants were the most commonly identified industry, accounting for 26% of all work-related injuries to teens. The second most commonly identified industry was grocery stores, accounting for 13% of all injuries, followed by retail bakeries (7%), nursing homes (5%), and department stores (4%). For each of these industries, the *Teens at Work Project* is preparing fact sheets that may be used by industry, labor, educators, parents, and teens themselves in developing injury prevention strategies. The first fact sheet is included below and highlights work-related injuries sustained by teens employed in restaurants. Other fact sheets will be posted at a later date.

Figure A.



Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project, July 1993 - June 1999.