



Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project

Occupational Health Surveillance Program

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Background

While work can provide benefits to youth, it can also pose safety risks. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's *Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project* (TAW) collects data on work-related injuries to minors, and uses the information to help plan prevention activities throughout the state.

The findings presented here are based on data collected by TAW during the calendar years 2005-2010 using information from workers' compensation (WC) lost wage claims, for injuries resulting in five or more lost work days, and reports from a sample of hospital emergency departments (ED).

For a detailed description of the project, please see our "Overview Fact Sheet." All of our materials are available online: www.mass.gov/dph/teensatwork.

Overview

From 2005 through 2010, the retail trade, not including grocery stores*, was the third most common industry of employment for 15- to 17-year-olds in Massachusetts.

171 (10%) of the 1,666 work-related injuries identified by the TAW Project from 2005 through 2010 happened in retail settings.

65% of these injuries were identified through WC lost wage claims, and 35% through hospital ED reports.

This fact sheet provides a closer look at these non-fatal injuries to teens working in the retail trade industry, excluding grocery stores.

* See our *Teens at Work Fact Sheet: Grocery Stores*.

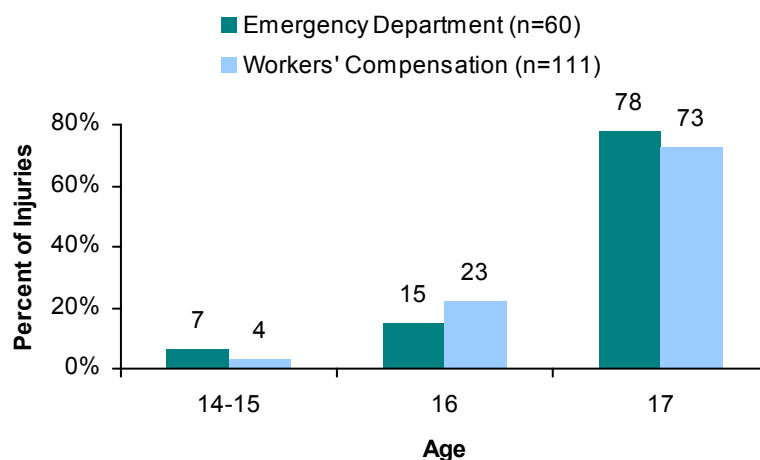
Injuries by Age

In both data sets, **approximately three-quarters of injuries to teens working in retail, not including grocery stores, were among 17-year-olds.**

Injuries to 16-year-olds were less common than those to 17-year-olds, but still accounted for 23% of those identified through WC data, and 15% of those identified through ED data.

There were very few injuries to 14- and 15-year-olds working in retail services (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Work-related injuries to teens under age 18 in retail trade* by age and data source, Massachusetts, 2005-2010

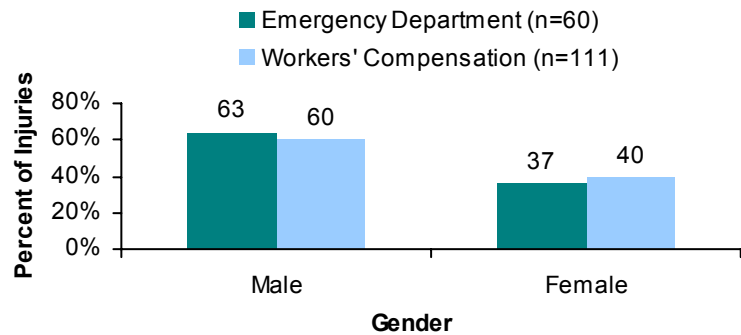


* These cases do not include injuries to teens working in grocery stores.
 Note: Cases where age was missing were not included in the calculations.
 Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, MDPH.

Injuries by Gender

Even though female workers made up about 60% of the teen workforce in retail trade, **male workers accounted for about 60% of the injuries identified.** This was true in both data sets (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Work-related injuries to teens under age 18 in retail trade*, by gender and data source, Massachusetts, 2005-2010



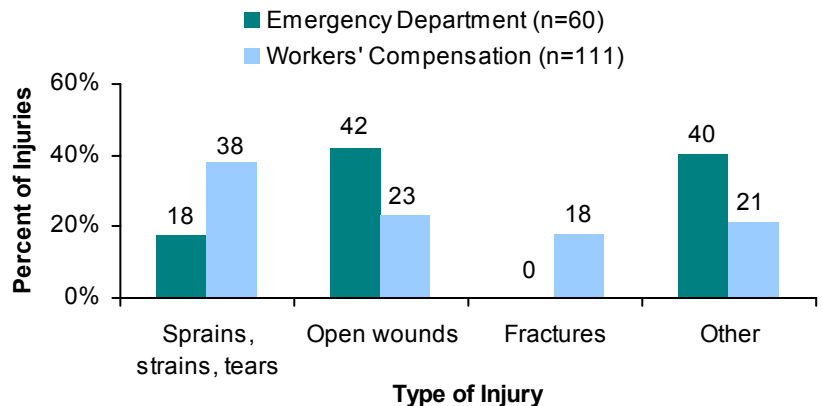
*These cases do not include injuries to teens working in grocery stores.
Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, MDPH.

Injury Type

Injury Type by Data Source

“Open wounds” (including cuts) was the most common type of injury among teen retail workers within the ED data set; “sprains, strains and tears” was the most common in WC data (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Work-related injuries to teens under age 18 in retail trade*, by injury type and data source, Massachusetts, 2005-2010



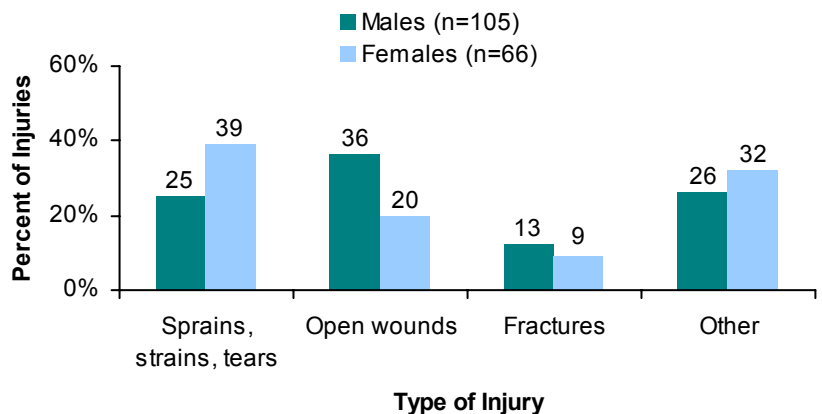
*These cases do not include injuries to teens working in grocery stores.
Note: Cases where injury type was unknown were not included in the calculations.
Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, MDPH.

The more common injuries are likely explained by the type of tasks assigned to teens, such as cutting open or lifting merchandise boxes.

Injury Type by Gender

While “sprains, strains and tears” were the most frequent injury among female teen retail workers, “open wounds” were most common among males (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Work-related injuries to teens under age 18 in retail trade*, by injury type and gender, Massachusetts, 2005-2010



*These cases do not include injuries to teens working in grocery stores.
Note: Cases where gender was known but injury type was missing were not included in the calculations.
Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, MDPH.

30% of injured teens interviewed expected permanent pain, loss of feeling, or limited movement from their retail injury.

Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, 2000-2010, MDPH.

Injury Type (continued)

Open Wounds by Body Part Affected

Among teen workers with “open wound” injuries, including cuts, lacerations and punctures, fingers were the body part affected most frequently (Figure 5).

It is not surprising, then, that **6 of the 14 injuries for which source was known were the result of some kind of cutter—either a knife, box cutter, or other hand cutter.**

Sprains, Strains and Tears by Body Part Affected

Of the 43 “sprains, strains and tears” injuries to teens working in retail, 19 of them affected the teens’ backs (Figure 6).

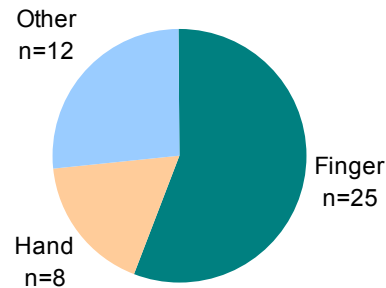
Among the 34 “sprain” injuries for which event type was known, over half involved either lifting (11 cases) or some other kind of overexertion (6 cases).

Injury Type by Age

“Sprains, strains and tears” were the most common type of injury among 16-year-old retail workers. This age group had a higher percentage of both “sprains” and “fractures” than did 17-year-olds.

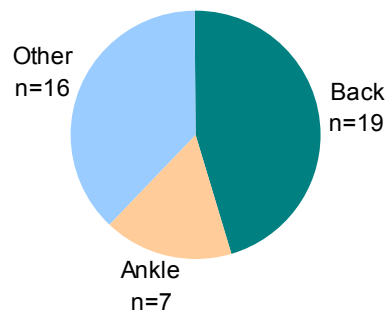
Among 17-year-olds, “sprain” injuries and “open wounds” each accounted for about the same number of injuries (Figure 7).

Figure 5. Work-related open wounds to teens under age 18 in retail trade*, by body part affected, Massachusetts, 2005-2010 (n=46)



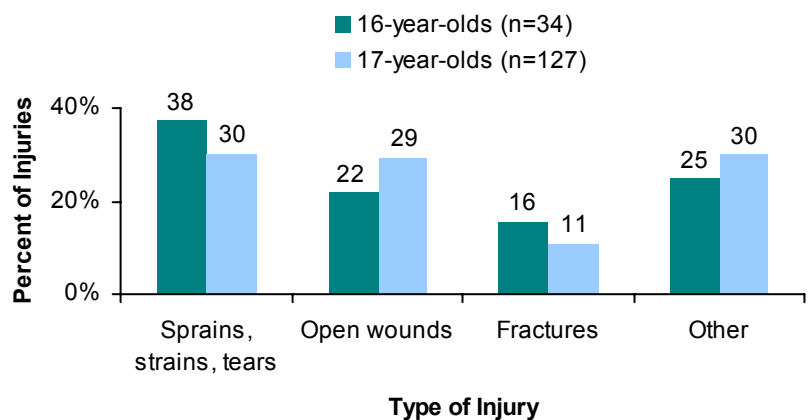
*These cases do not include injuries to teens working in grocery stores.
Note: Cases where body part affected was unknown were not included in the calculations.
Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, MDPH.

Figure 6. Work-related sprains, strains and tears to teens under age 18 in retail trade*, by body part affected, Massachusetts, 2005-2010 (n=43)



*These cases do not include injuries to teens working in grocery stores.
Note: Cases where body part affected was missing were not included in the calculations.
Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, MDPH.

Figure 7. Work-related injuries to teens under age 18 in retail trade*, by injury type and age, Massachusetts, 2005-2010



*These cases do not include injuries to teens working in grocery stores.
Note: Cases where injury type was missing were not included in the calculations.
Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, MDPH.

What Injured Teens Have to Say

From 2000 through 2010, TAW staff completed interviews with 40 teen retail workers who were injured on the job. While the information from these interviews does not necessarily represent all young workers who have been injured, it provides important insights about the impact of injuries on teens, and safety gaps that need to be addressed.

Among interviewed teens working in retail: 65% believed their injury could have been prevented; 60% said they had received no job safety training; 33% reported having no work permit for their job at the time of their injury; and 30% expected to have some kind of permanent effect from their injury. These are all higher proportions of teens when compared to all industries combined (Figure 8).

Massachusetts child labor laws require minors to have work permits, which may be acquired through the school district in which the teen lives or goes to school.

Young Worker Voices:

“It happened when I was lifting a heavy furniture item. My doctor had me take a week off and gave me Motrin® for the pain and a different medication for my back spasms.”

—17-year-old male display arranger, department store

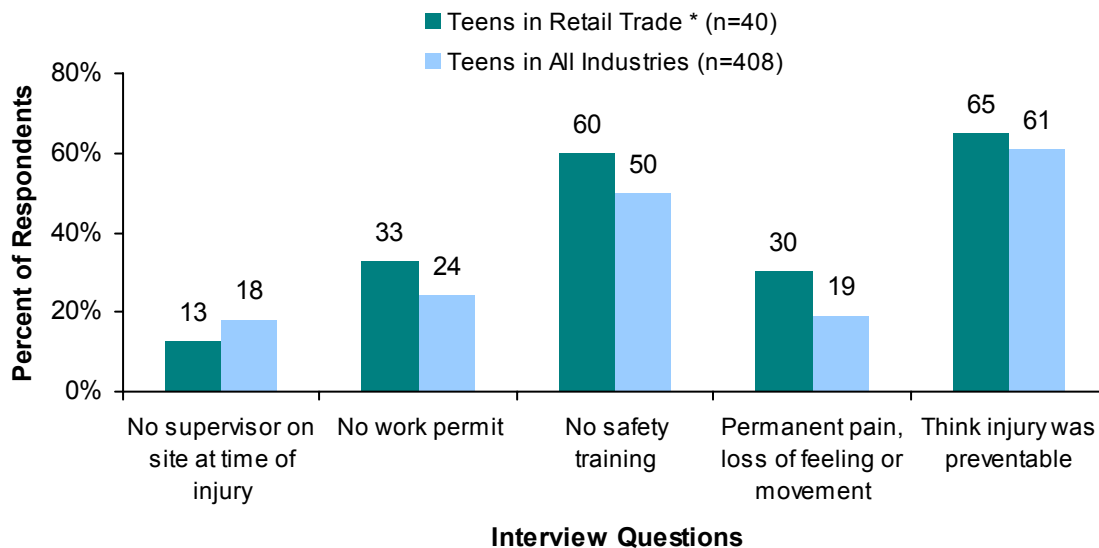
“I was ringing at check lanes and a guest came through my line. They had a CD rack that was very heavy. However, there was no one around so I lifted it. What I didn't realize at the time was I reached and twisted to get it. Then I felt the pain in my back.”

—17-year-old female cashier, department store

“I was cutting boxes and I cut myself on the thumb with a box cutter. I was alone in the back room.”

—17-year-old male stock handler, drug store

Figure 8. Interviews with teens injured at work in retail trade*, Massachusetts, 2000-2010



*These cases do not include injuries to teens working in grocery stores.
Source: Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance System, MDPH.

If you have questions about the information presented here, contact Project Coordinator Beatriz Pazos Vautin: 617-624-5632 or Beatriz.Pazos@state.ma.us.

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