

eNewsletter for Ontario Teachers • October 2016

October is Global Ergonomics Month: Improve posture in the classroom and the workplace

It can take about 15 years for your body to show the effects of bad posture and awkward positions. By the time kindergarten students are in post-secondary school, poor posture when sitting, awkward carrying of heavy backpacks and stresses on the body from playing video games, using mobile devices, and long hours on the computer may begin to show up as aching muscles or joint pain. Teaching students how to prevent Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD) early on could prevent them from a lifetime of pain or discomfort.

MSDs are the number one type of work-related lost-time claim reported to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board in Ontario. These are injuries and disorders of the musculoskeletal system, including the muscles, tendons, nerves and spinal discs. They can develop as a result of ongoing exposure to such things as repetitive work, forceful exertions such as heavy lifting, pulling and pushing, and awkward postures that can affect the bones, joints, ligaments and other soft tissues. The good news is that MSD hazards can be eliminated or reduced by following some straightforward [ergonomics principles](#).

October is Global Ergonomics Month, an initiative held annually to raise awareness of ergonomics and MSD hazards. The goal is to eliminate these hazards and prevent injuries. The internationally recognized month is a great opportunity for educators to engage with students and parents on the importance of good posture and ergonomics, as well as identifying MSD hazards in classrooms, homes and workplaces.

Quick tips to improve posture in the classroom:

- Encourage students to “sit square in the chair” rather than in a twisted position or sitting with their feet tucked under them. Knees should be at or slightly below the hips, with thighs parallel to the floor. Their backs should be straight with both feet flat on the floor.
- When sitting on the floor, children can take a few minutes to practice straightening out their backs and sitting tall.
- When standing in a line, stand straight and tall.
- Students should be sitting at least an arm’s length away from any screen and it should be at eye-level, with the top of the screen level with the students’ foreheads. Make sure their heads are straight and not looking up or down at the screen. Adjust the screen by raising or lowering it.
- Encourage short stretch breaks every 30 minutes.
- Find ways to reinforce good posture every day.

Resources

For more information and activities on posture and ergonomics hazards, visit the [Live Safe! Work Smart! website](#) and the Ministry of Labour’s [MSD web page](#).

Changes to Minimum Wage

Minimum wage is the lowest wage rate an employer can pay an employee. Effective October 1, 2016, the

general minimum wage rate will go up from \$11.25 per hour to \$11.40 per hour.

The student minimum wage will also increase from \$10.55 per hour to \$10.70 per hour on October 1, 2016. This rate applies to students under the age of 18 who work 28 hours a week or less when school is in session, or work during a school break or summer holidays. Students who work more than 28 hours a week while school is in session are entitled to the general minimum wage.

Learn more about the [minimum wage](#).

New Animated Video: Tips and Other Gratuities

The Ministry of Labour has launched a new video titled *Tips and Other Gratuities*. The video is the latest in a series of new resources developed by ministry to help employees and employers understand the new rules around the handling of tips and other gratuities in the workplace.

The video is available on YouTube and can be accessed via the Ministry of Labour [website](#). For more information, visit Ontario.ca/tipsandgratuities.

What students should consider before volunteering

High school students are required to complete 40 hours of volunteer work before graduating. As a teen volunteer, they are at risk to the same hazards that have resulted in serious injuries to young workers in Ontario. Although the definition of “worker” in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* does not include volunteers, a volunteer is under no obligation to accept an assignment which may be unsafe and at any time can refuse any task they may be asked to do. Here are some safety tips students should consider when volunteering:

1. Stay away from operating machinery wherever possible

Operating industrial equipment (e.g. forklifts, motorized carts, mixers in a kitchen, lawnmowers and trimmers) requires training.

2. Keep away from chemicals

Under the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) there are strict requirements for labelling, worker training and providing safety information about hazards chemicals and other substances. If you can avoid working with them, do! If you must work with them, insist on training.

3. Back off from biological exposure

People, animals and things that pose a biological hazard may have to be handled, but you need to know how to do it right. Rubber gloves and heavy-duty hand washing are work procedures people exposed to these hazards are taught and learn to do every day.

4. By-pass slips and falls

Watch out for wet, icy or uneven floors. Only climb to reach something over your head if you have a proper ladder that's in good shape. Climbing up on shelves, standing on stools, rolling carts, boxes, etc. may seem like they're 'good enough', but they aren't. You deserve the right equipment.

5. One size does not fit all

In a volunteer situation where sometimes there are a lot of different jobs to be done (like working on a food drive), volunteer to do a job that you think you can handle. Not everyone is physically capable of carrying heavy boxes or helping seniors in and out of chairs.

Did you know? Age Matters.

You can't be a volunteer:

- on a construction site or logging operation unless you're 16
- in a factory setting or restaurant kitchen unless you're 15
- in other industrial workplaces unless you're 14.

To learn more, visit the ministry's [webpage on volunteers](#).

Bring Safety Home: new website for parents and teachers

Earlier this summer, Workplace Safety and Prevention Services, in association with the Ministry of Labour, launched a website focused on helping parents and other adults, like teachers, play a more significant role in their kids' workplace safety.

Bring Safety Home provides resources and insight on how to have a productive dialogue with youth about their workplaces. It also includes information on worker rights and common hazards that cause injury to young workers. The website offers compelling stories, videos and information specific to the service, agriculture, and manufacturing sector.

To learn more, visit [Bring Safety Home](#).

Passionate about workplace safety? Enter the *It's Your Job* student video contest!

The Ministry of Labour is accepting entries for the 2016/17 *It's Your Job* video contest. All Ontario secondary school students are eligible to participate. Get your students ready to develop an original video that can be used on social media to illustrate the importance of working safely on the job.

Students and their schools can win cash prizes, as well as provincial and national recognition. The first place video in the national contest will be premiered at the North American Occupational Safety and Health (NAOSH) Week launch ceremony on May 7, 2017.

The deadline to submit videos is **March 3, 2017**. Visit the [contest page](#) to learn more about the contest and prizes.

See, share and show the top 2015/16 videos to your students! Check out our [winners](#) for some inspiration.

Links

[Publications Ontario](#)

Ministry of Labour [resource website for teachers](#)

[Ministry of Labour's Young Workers webpage](#)

[Read previous editions of the newsletter](#)

Email your ideas for articles to: Marie.Faminial@ontario.ca