

The working week

Hours and rest breaks

This Factsheet will help you understand exactly what rest breaks you must offer your employee. It will explain the special rules that apply to young workers and the sectors, which are exempt from the rules.

The rules about hours of work

If you're an employer your employee's hours will normally be governed by the Working Time Regulations. These cover:

- The maximum average working week
- Holiday entitlement
- The right to rest breaks during the working day
- The right to rest periods between working days
- Hours when working at night

Working hours

Domestic employees, including nannies, are exempt from the measures concerning working hours and the maximum average working week (this includes the rules regarding hours when working at night).

Rest breaks

All employees aged 18 or over are entitled to a 20 minute rest break for every six hours worked. You can determine the break's timing, though it mustn't be offered at the beginning or end of a shift. It is also your duty to ensure that your employee can take their breaks. Remember that you should also allow your workers any breaks they need as a result of any health condition or disability or you could be in breach of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Please note that young workers, aged 16 and 17, should take at least 30 minutes' break if they work more than four and a half hours. If they also work for another employer, the time worked in total must be considered when calculating entitlement to breaks.

Rest periods between working days

Your employee is entitled to regular rest periods between working days, which are in addition to any holiday entitlement. Workers aged 18 and over should have a minimum 11 hours' rest between each working day, and shouldn't be forced to work more than six days in every seven, or 12 days in every 14. It's especially important this is considered when arranging shifts.

Exceptions can be made for:

- Busy periods
- Emergencies
- People working away from home

In these cases, rest periods can be accumulated and taken later.

Young workers, aged 16 and 17, must work no more than eight hours a day and 40 hours a week. These hours cannot be averaged out. They must also have 12 hours' rest between working days and two days off every week, normally two consecutive days. Only in exceptional circumstances can these rules be changed.

Holiday Entitlement - see separate Factsheet for full details

In general, employees are entitled to 5.6 weeks' holiday a year.