

Guidelines for Meal Periods

Section 162 of the New York State Labor Law provides as follows:

Time Allowed For Meals:

1. Every person employed in or in connection with a factory shall be allowed at least sixty minutes for the noonday meal.
2. Every person employed in or in connection with a mercantile or other establishment or occupation coming under the provisions of this chapter shall be allowed at least thirty minutes for the noonday meal, except as in this chapter otherwise provided. The noonday meal period is recognized as extending from eleven o'clock in the morning to two o'clock in the afternoon. An employee who works a shift of more than six hours, which extends over the noonday meal period, is entitled to at least thirty minutes off within that period for the meal period.
3. Every person employed for a period or shift starting before eleven o'clock in the morning and continuing later than seven o'clock in the evening shall be allowed an additional meal period of at least twenty minutes between five and seven o'clock in the evening.
4. Every person employed for a period or shift of more than six hours starting between the hours of one o'clock in the afternoon and six o'clock in the morning, shall be allowed at least sixty minutes for a meal period when employed in or in connection with a factory, and forty-five minutes for a meal period when employed in or in connection with a mercantile or other establishment or occupation coming under the provision of this chapter, at a time midway between the beginning and end of such employment.
5. The commissioner may permit a shorter time to be fixed for meal periods than hereinbefore provided. The permit therefore shall be in writing and shall be kept conspicuously posted in the main entrance of the establishment. Such permit may be revoked at any time.

In administering this statute, the Department applies the following interpretations and guidelines:

Employee Coverage:

Section 162 applies to every "person" in any establishment or occupation covered by the Labor Law. Accordingly, all categories of workers are covered, including white-collar management staff.

Shorter Meal Periods:

The Department will permit a shorter meal period of not less than 30 minutes as a matter of course, without application by the employer, so long as there is no indication of hardship to employees. A meal period of not less than 20 minutes will be permitted only in special or unusual cases after investigation and issuance of a special permit.

One Employee Shift:

In some instances where only one person is on duty or is the only one in a specific occupation, it is customary for the employee to eat on the job without being relieved. The Department of Labor will accept these special situations as compliance with Section 162 where the employee voluntarily consents to the arrangements. However, an uninterrupted meal period must be afforded to every employee who requests this from an employer.

Not all possible meal period questions can be anticipated and, therefore, these "Guidelines" may not cover all situations that might arise. For additional information or assistance, contact any of the Division of Labor Standards offices listed below:

Albany District
1220 Washington Ave.
Bldg. 12 Room 185A
Albany, NY 12226
(518) 457-2730

Buffalo District
295 Main Street
Suite 914
Buffalo, NY 14203
(716) 847-7141

New York City District
55 Hanson Place
11th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
(212) 775-3880

Syracuse District
333 East Washington Street
Room 121
Syracuse, NY 13202
(315) 428-4057

Bronx District
55 Hanson Place
11th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
(212) 775-3597

Garden City District
400 Oak Street
Suite 102
Garden City, NY 11530
(516) 794-8195

Rochester District
276 Waring Road
Room 104
Rochester, NY 14609
(585) 258-4550

White Plains District
120 Bloomingdale Road
White Plains, NY 10605
(914) 997-9521