Q. Do we have to pay employees for the time they spend changing into their uniforms before work (and out of their uniforms afterward)? We're a hospital and our operating-room personnel must change clothes. —E.T., Maryland

A. The rule is different for union and nonunion employers. For nonunion employers, time spent changing clothes is compensable whenever the changing is required by either the employer or the nature of the work. If employees change clothes before or after work for their own convenience, you don't have to pay for the changing time.

In unionized workplaces, employers aren't required to pay for clothes-changing time even if it's necessary for the job if the exclusion is established by a past practice or a collective-bargaining agreement.

In your case, you say your hospital requires clothes-changing for some employees. Unless the unionized workplace rules apply, this time must be counted as compensable. Finally, remember that some state wage-and-hour laws may have slightly different rules.