



BULLETIN

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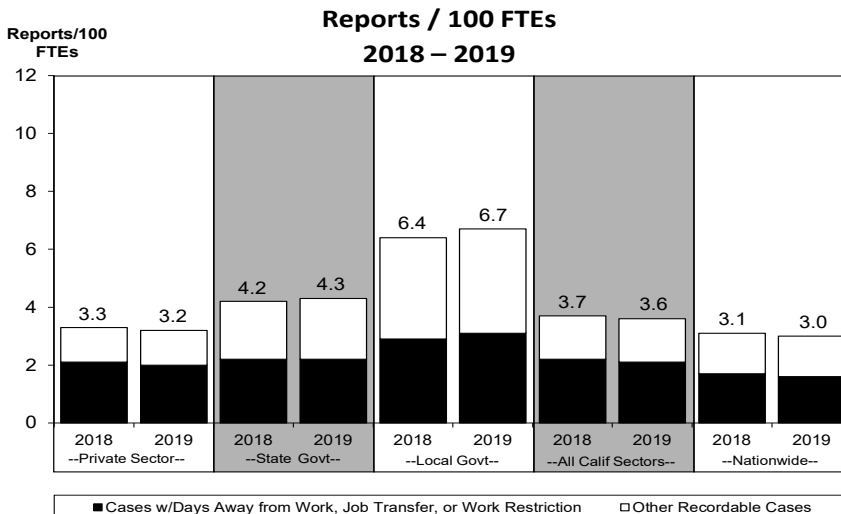
The estimated number of nonfatal work injuries and illnesses in California rose 3.6 percent between 2018 and 2019, though the nonfatal work injury and illness rate per 100 full time employees (FTEs) showed almost no change as statewide employment hit record levels prior to the pandemic according to recent data from the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR).

The figures released in November by the DIR Director's Office of Policy, Research and Legislation (OPRL) are based on estimates provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (SOII), and offer an alternate view of the state's work injury and illness experience than workers' compensation claim counts, as they include cases recorded by employers for which workers' compensation claims may or may not have been filed. Rather than counting indemnity and medical-only claims, the report tracks cases that result in days away from work, as well as those with restricted work activity or job transfer ("DART" cases); and those that are not DART cases, but that must be recorded on OSHA 300 or OSHA 301 incident reports because they involved treatment beyond first aid or a diagnosis of significant injury or illness ("other recordable" cases).

The 2019 survey estimates that public & private employers in California recorded 483,300 nonfatal work injuries and illnesses, about 17,000 more than in 2018, but with job growth in the state pushing the unemployment rate down from 4.3 percent in January 2019 to an all-time low of 3.9 percent by the end of the year, the incidence of recordable work injuries and illnesses per 100 FTEs showed little change. Nearly 59 percent (284,700) of the 2019 injuries and illnesses were DART cases, while the balance were "other recordable cases," which was the same distribution as in 2018. The breakdown of California's work injuries and illnesses among private sector, local government, and state government workers shifted slightly last year, as the number of claims per 100 FTEs in the private sector fell from 3.3 to 3.2 as their incidence of DART cases fell from 2.1 to 2.0 claims per 100 employees, while private sector employees' rate of other recordable claims held steady at 1.2 claims per 100 FTEs.

As usual, the work injury and illness rate was highest among local government employees, who hold about 11% of all jobs in the state -- including many in high-risk occupations such as public safety officers, as well as transit workers and teachers. Among local government employees, the rate of DART claims per 100 FTEs rose from 2.9 to 3.1 (driven up by an increase in the number of cases resulting in days away from work rather than cases resulting in work restrictions or job transfers), while the rate of other recordable claims edged up from 3.5 to 3.6, so their

California & Nationwide Work Injury & Illness Rates by Sector



overall incidence of recordable claims increased from 6.4 to 6.7 cases per 100 employees. Meanwhile, the work injury and illness rate for state employees, who make up roughly 3 percent of the California work force, registered a slight increase, climbing from 4.2 to 4.3 cases per 100 employees, though all of that was due to a slight increase in the number of “other recordable” cases per 100 FTEs, which rose from 2.0 to 2.1, while the rate of DART cases among the state government employees held steady at 2.2 cases per 100 FTEs.

California’s Department of Industrial Relations and similar agencies in other states, conduct the OSHA Injury and Illness Census in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Nationwide, the BLS data indicate that private employers and state and local governments reported nearly 3.497 million work injuries and illnesses in 2019, which translates to an overall rate of 3.0 cases per 100 FTEs), down from 3.1 cases per 100 FTEs in 2018, as the incidence of DART cases nationwide fell from 1.7 to 1.6 cases per 100 FTEs. A comparison of California’s 2019 results to the nationwide figures shows that California accounted for 13.8 percent of the work injuries and illnesses cases in the U.S. – including 15.2 percent of all DART cases. California’s overall injury and illness rate of 3.6 was above the nationwide rate of 3.0 as the incidence of DART cases was significantly higher than the nationwide rate (2.1 vs. 1.6 cases per 100 FTE) though the incidence of other recordable cases was only marginally higher (1.5 cases vs. 1.4 cases).

Variations in work injury and illness rates among jurisdictions can reflect a number of factors, including differences in the mix of jobs and industries, demographic and environmental differences, differences in state laws and regulations, and safety and return-to-work programs and enforcement levels. The level and accuracy of employer reporting also may vary – a problem that was highlighted more than a decade ago by several studies that questioned the completeness of the BLS data. The Bureau subsequently conducted internal research on the issue and, at the request of Congress, established a program to address potential undercounting of work injuries and illnesses and improve employers’ recordkeeping practices. A revised Occupational Injury and Illness Classification System was put in place in 2011, and BLS is currently working on an update to that system in order to align the results with data users’ areas of interest, update the structure to reflect technological changes and the current state of workplace hazards, accommodate varying levels of case detail, and improve the ease and consistency of coding.

More details and data tables from the 2019 nonfatal injury and illness surveys for California are posted on the Department of Industrial Relations Director’s Office of Policy, Research and Legislation web page at <http://www.dir.ca.gov/OPRL/Injuries/2019/Menu.htm>. Nationwide results for 2019, along with information on the impact of the pandemic on the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses as well as the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, which is scheduled to be released on December 16, are on the U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics website at <http://www.bls.gov/iif/home.htm>.

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