California Workers' Compensation Institute

1333 Broadway, Suite 510, Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 251-9470
www.cwci.org

BULLETIN

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The latest wave of COVID-19 infections, fueled by the surge in the Delta variant, has hit the California workers' compensation system, as the number of COVID-19 claims increased nearly four-fold between June and July according to new data posted this week on CWCI's COVID-19/Non-COVID-19 Interactive Claim Application.

The new data on COVID-19 claims reported as of August 9 shows that after trending down over the first half of this year and falling to a 16-month low of just 676 claims in June, the total number of COVID-19 claims recorded by the state's Workers' Compensation Information System (WCIS) spiked to 2,581 in July, just shy of the combined total of 2,635 COVID claims recorded for the prior three months. Additional claims with July injury dates are still coming in, but CWCI projections based on historical reporting patterns estimate that ultimately the COVID-19 claim count for July will hit 3,872 cases, which is 4.8 times the projected total of 811 claims for June.

Notably, July was the first full month after the full reopening of the California economy on June 15, a move that included elimination of the state's COVID restrictions (physical distancing, capacity limits, county tier systems, and masking requirements) and allowed most businesses to fully reopen and bring thousands of remote workers back into offices and other worksites, increasing the opportunities for workplace exposures to the coronavirus. July was also the first full month following the June 17 adoption and implementation of revised emergency health and safety standards to protect workers from COVID-19. Those standards, adopted following contentious public meetings, apply to most California workers not covered by Cal/OSHA's standard for aerosol transmissible diseases. Among other things, the revised standards allowed fully vaccinated employees to not wear face coverings (but required unvaccinated employees to mask up when in a room or vehicle with other employees) and eliminated the physical distance requirement in non-outbreak settings. With the recent surge in COVID infections and hospitalizations, several local jurisdictions and entities around the state have now enacted their own mandates in regard to masking and employee vaccinations, and on July 26 Governor Newsom issued an order that is being phased in this month requiring nearly a quarter million state employees as well as public and private health care workers to be vaccinated or undergo weekly COVID tests. This week, the governor extended the vaccinate-or-test requirement to encompass an additional 320,000 school employees in the state. Public and private K-12 schools have until October 15 to fully comply with the order.

While the resurgence of California workers' compensation COVID-19 claims has been broad-based, a comparison of the June and July claims data shows that the extent of the surge has varied by region and industry. Although data for the two most recent months is relatively green, the month-to-month increase of 1,905 COVID claims was significant and a sharp contrast to the downtrend of the prior six months. The following tables help identify where the recent growth in COVID claims came from by tracking the changes in claim volume by region and by industry between June and July of AY 2021.

Changes in the Volume and Distribution of COVID-19 Claims by Region, June to July AY 2021

Region	June AY 2021		July AY 2021		June to July Change	
	# of Claims	% of COVID Claims	# of Claims	% of COVID Claims	# of Claims	% Increase
L.A. County	128	18.9%	621	24.1%	+ 493	385%
Bay Area	136	20.1%	552	21.4%	+ 416	306%
Inland Emp./O.C.	131	19.4%	511	19.8%	+ 380	290%
Central Valley	149	22.0%	418	16.2%	+ 269	181%
San Diego	46	6.8%	244	9.5%	+ 198	430%
Central Coast	27	4.0%	111	4.3%	+ 84	311%
N. Counties/Sierra	40	5.9%	72	2.8%	+ 32	80%
Out of State	12	1.8%	13	0.5%	+ 1	8%
Unknown	7	1.0%	39	1.5%	+ 32	457%
All	676	100%	2,581	100%	+1,905	282%

As noted in the table, much of the July surge in COVID claims occurred in the state's metropolitan job centers. Los Angeles County, which accounts for more than a quarter of all jobs in the state, had 128 COVID-19 claims in June, which translates to 18.9% of the statewide total, ranking it behind the Central Valley (22.0%), the Bay Area (20.1%), and the Inland Empire/Orange County (19.4%). But in July, L.A. County's COVID claim volume soared to 621 claims, nearly 5 times its June total, so it surpassed every other region of the state as its share of the statewide COVID claim count rose to 24.1%. The Bay Area continued to have the second highest volume of COVID claims in the state, as its claim total more than quadrupled from 136 to 552 claims, but that growth was only slightly higher than the statewide growth rate, so its overall share of the statewide COVID claim total only rose from 20.1% to 21.4%. The number of COVID claims in the Inland Empire/Orange County also nearly quadrupled between June and July, climbing from 131 to 511 claims, so its share of the statewide total edged up from 19.4% to 19.8%, and it remained the number 3 region in the state for COVID claims. In the other major metropolitan region of the state, San Diego, the COVID claim count was 5.3 times higher in July (244) than in June (46), which pushed its share of the statewide claim total from 6.8% to 9.5%. Meanwhile COVID claim volume in the Central Valley increased from 149 claims in June to 418 in July, but that lagged the statewide growth rate, so its share of the statewide claim total fell from 22.0% to 16.2%, and it went from being the number one region in the state for COVID claims in June to being the number 4 region in July.

The breakdown of COVID claims by industry shows public safety/government workers continued to account for more claims than any other sector, as their claim total increased to 546 claims in July, 3.8 times the June tally of 144 claims. That growth rate was in line with the statewide increase, so their share of the COVID claim total remained at just over 21%. COVID claim volume for health care workers also rose sharply, increasing from 124 claims in June to 456 in July, but that was slightly less than the statewide growth rate, so their share of the statewide total dipped from 18.3% to 17.7%. The transportation sector saw the biggest increase in its share of the COVID claims, as it went from 59 claims in June to 352 claims in July, a 6-fold increase that moved it ahead of both the retail and the food service sectors, making it the number 3 industry sector for COVID claims last month. Sharp increases in COVID claim volume were also noted among retail workers, who had 222 more claims in July than in June, so their share of the statewide total jumped from 9.8% to 11.2% and manufacturing workers, whose claim count rose from 20 to 143, increasing their share of the statewide total from 3.0% in June to 5.5% in July. The biggest percentage increases were in sectors that had relatively few COVID claims in June, such as the education sector, where claim volume went from 11 claims in June to 72 in July, for an increase of 555%, and the professional/technical sector, which went from 7 claims in June to 58 in July, a 729% increase.

Changes in the Volume and Distribution of COVID-19 Claims by Industry, June to July AY 2021

Industry	June AY 2021		July AY 2021		June to July Change	
	# of Claims	% of COVID Claims	# of Claims	% of COVID Claims	# of Claims	% Increase
Public Safety/Govt	144	21.3%	546	21.2%	+ 402	279%
Health Care	124	18.3%	456	17.7%	+ 332	268%
Transportation	59	8.7%	352	13.6%	+ 293	497%
Retail	66	9.8%	288	11.2%	+ 222	336%
Manufacturing	20	3.0%	143	5.5%	+ 123	615%
Food Service	60	8.9%	133	5.2%	+ 73	122%
Accommodation	22	3.3%	74	2.9%	+ 52	236%
Education	11	1.6%	72	2.8%	+ 61	555%
Admin/Waste	23	3.4%	59	2.3%	+ 36	157%
Professional/Tech	7	1.0%	58	2.2%	+ 51	729%
Construction	20	3.0%	48	1.9%	+ 28	140%
Finance	12	1.8%	47	1.8%	+ 35	292%
Wholesale	8	1.2%	35	1.4%	+ 27	338%
All Other *	100	14.8%	270	10.4%	+170	170%
All	676	100%	2,581	100%	+1,905	282%

*The "All Other" category includes industries not among the top 12 for COVID claims in June or July and unknowns.

The Institute continues to monitor COVID-19 claim activity and posts updates on the COVID-19/non-COVID 19 app on a biweekly basis. The latest update to the app can be viewed by clicking here.