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BULLETIN

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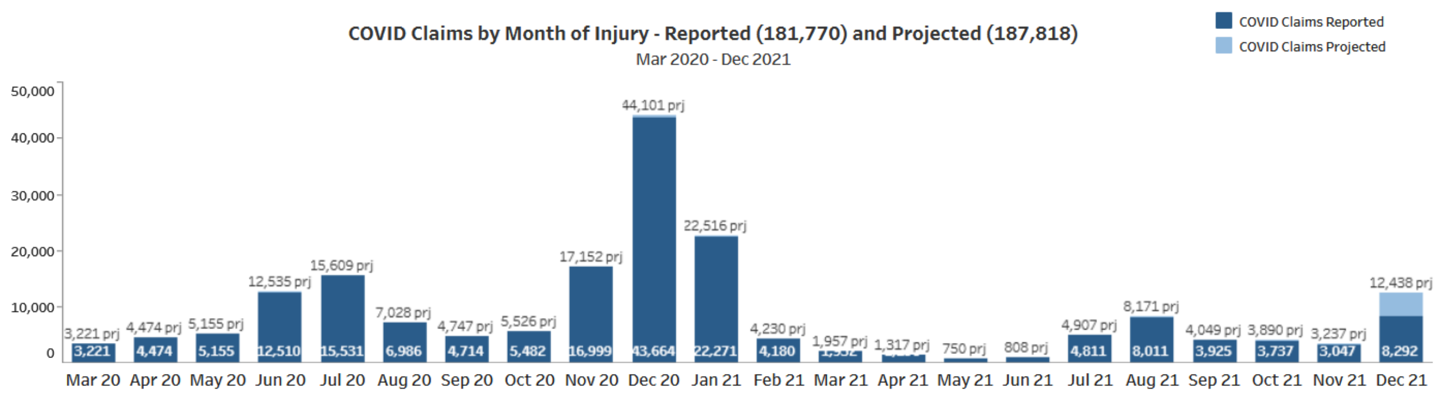
After peaking in August then declining steadily throughout the fall, the monthly count of COVID-19 California workers' compensation claims skyrocketed from 3,047 claims in November to 8,292 claims in December – the second highest level of the year – as the highly contagious Omicron variant began to take a toll, with CWCI projecting that the December total could ultimately climb to 12,438 cases as claims that are still being filed or investigated are added to the tally.

The January 10 update to CWCI's COVID-19/Non-COVID-19 Interactive Application, which includes detailed data on California workers' comp claims from comparable periods of 2019, 2020, and 2021, shows that since the pandemic was declared in March 2020 there have been 181,770 COVID claims reported to the state Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC). The recent results show that after falling to a 5-month low in November, the monthly COVID claim count reversed course in December as the Omicron variant led to a wave of coronavirus cases throughout the state. Additional claims with November and December injury dates are still being reported, but the current count of 8,292 COVID claims for December represents a one-month increase of 172% and is already above the peak level reached in August during last summer's Delta surge.

The year-end surge pushed the total number of COVID claims reported to the DWC for AY 2021 to 63,034, or 10.0% of all AY 2021 work injury and illness claims reported to the state. That total was well below the 118,995 COVID claims reported for AY 2020 (17.9% of all workers' compensation claims reported for that year) when there were only a handful of COVID claims reported for January and February, but COVID vaccines were not available. However, with the Omicron surge at the end of 2021, the COVID claims' share of all California workers' compensation claims more than tripled from 6.6% in November to 20.5% in December – the highest percentage since January 2021.



The latest report also shows a total of 1,284 COVID death claims since the pandemic began, with 955 of those having 2020 injury dates and 329 having 2021 injury dates. That means COVID death claims accounted for 54.5% of the 1,752 work-related death claims reported to the DWC for AY 2020 and 39.4% of the 836 death claims reported thus far for AY 2021. In 2020, there were 80 deaths per 10,000 COVID claims (vs. 15 deaths per 10,000 non-COVID claims), while in AY 2021, the rate declined to 52 deaths per 10,000 COVID claims (vs. 9 deaths per 10,000 non-COVID claims).

The distribution of COVID claims by industry shows the top six industry sectors for COVID claims (public safety/government, health care, transportation, retail, food service, and manufacturing) have remained unchanged since the beginning of the pandemic, but the distribution of COVID claims among those six sectors continues to shift. COVID claims were most prevalent in the health care sector during the early stages of the pandemic, accounting for nearly a third (32.5%) of the AY 2020 COVID claims, but following the introduction of vaccines and increased safety procedures that percentage dropped to 22.5% in AY 2021. At the same time, public safety/government workers' share of the COVID claims increased from 16.7% in AY 2020 to 24.7% in AY 2021, as their proportion rose steadily as the year progressed, climbing from 20.7% of the COVID claims in the first quarter to 30.8% of the COVID claims in the fourth quarter. As a result of this rapid growth, the public safety/government sector surpassed the health care industry to become the #1 sector for California workers' compensation COVID claims in AY 2021. Among the other top sectors:

- Retail workers' share of the COVID claims increased from 9.9% of the claims in AY 2020 to 10.7% in AY 2021, as their share fluctuated throughout the year, ranging from a low of 8.7% in the third quarter to a high of 12.3% in the first quarter.
- Transportation workers saw their share of the COVID claims increase from 6.1% in AY 2020 to 10.4% in AY 2021, as their proportion also climbed steadily throughout 2021, ratcheting up from 7.3% in the first quarter to 16.2% as the Omicron variant took hold in the fourth quarter.
- Food service workers also saw a slight increase in their share of the COVID claims last year, as they went from 4.7% of the AY 2020 claims to 5.0% of the AY 2021 claims after their proportion climbed from 4.7% in the first quarter to 8.1% in the second quarter then fell back to 4.6% by the end of the year.
- Workers in the manufacturing sector saw their share of the COVID claims decline from 7.7% in AY 2020 to 5.3% in AY 2021, as they dropped steadily from 6.4% of the claims in the first quarter of the year to 3.5% in the fourth quarter.

A look at other metrics reveals additional shifts that are occurring within the COVID claim population. For example, demographic data show that just over a quarter (25.2%) of the COVID claims from AY 2020 involved workers who were age 50 or above, and while that proportion showed little change in the first quarter of AY 2021 (25.4%), since then the share of COVID claims among these older workers has been trending down, falling to 20.5% of the claims in the second quarter, 20.1% of the claims in the third quarter and 18.7% of the COVID claims from the 4th quarter of 2021. Likewise, the distribution of COVID claims by gender reveals a sharp, ongoing decline in the percentage of COVID claims involving female workers. While nearly half (48.8%) of all COVID claimants in AY 2020 were female, that proportion trended down across all four quarters of AY 2021, falling to 46.0% in the first quarter of the year, 43.7% in the second quarter, 42.5% in the third quarter, and 40.2% in the fourth quarter. To some extent, the shift in the COVID claimant profile toward younger, male claimants is likely due to changes within the workforce (*e.g.*, older workers may be in a better position to work remotely or retire to reduce their exposure to the coronavirus, while female workers who are not the primary breadwinner or who have difficulty finding childcare may be opting to work remotely, shift to a job with less COVID exposure, or not to return to work). At the same time, the change in the mix of COVID claims by industry sector – most notably the sharp increase in claims among public safety workers (a field dominated by younger males) and the sharp decline in claims by health care workers (a majority of whom are female) – has also likely contributed to the shift toward younger, male COVID claimants.

CWCI continues to update its COVID-19/Non-COVID-19 app on a biweekly basis. The next update include data on claims reported to the DWC as of January 17. Those who wish to monitor COVID and non-COVID claim experience can access the CWCI app by clicking here.

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