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BULLETIN

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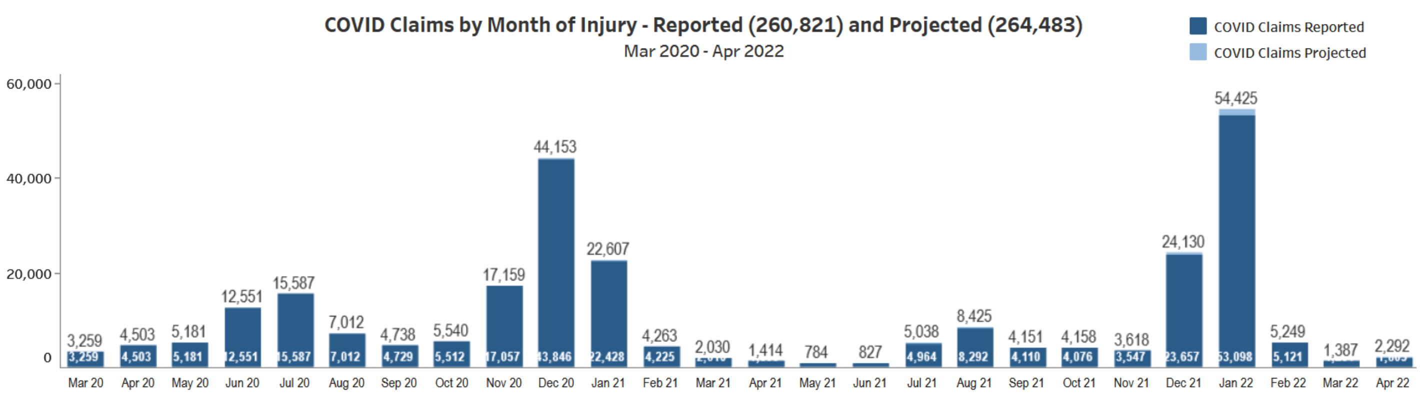
California workers' comp COVID-19 claim volume declined by nearly 98 percent between January and March of this year, but new data from CWCI's COVID-19/non-COVID-19 Interactive Claim App shows that with the recent spread of infections involving Omicron variants and subvariants the number of job-related COVID claims reported to the Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) is again on the rise. Current projections are that 2,292 COVID claims with April injury dates will eventually be filed, which would be an increase of 65.2 percent from the 1,387 claims projected for March, though that total would still be 95.8 percent below the all-time high of 54,425 COVID claims projected for January.

This week's update to CWCI's app contains detailed data on California workers' comp claims from pre- and post-pandemic periods, encompassing about 2.3 million COVID and no-COVID claims with dates of injury from January 1, 2019 through May 16, 2022 that have been reported to the DWC. The updated data show that the number of COVID claims with January injury dates reported thus far surged to an all-time high of 53,098 then plummeted more than 90 percent in February and another 75 percent between February and March before rebounding to 1,805 claims in April. Those totals will change as additional claims are still being reported for all four months, but CWCI's projections, which control for late reporting, also show the dramatic decline from January through March, followed by the recent increase in April.

While the projected month-to-month increase of 905 COVID claims between March and April is significant, projected claim totals for February and March are just a fraction of the record total from January. As a result, the projected COVID claim total for the three-month period of February through April represents less than one sixth of the projected monthly total for the single month of January, which accounted for more than 20 percent of all projected COVID claims since the pandemic was declared in March 2020. With the huge volume of claims in January, the latest tally shows that thus far, 61,285 COVID-19 claims have been reported for AY 2022, which translates to 25.4 percent of all reported California workers' comp claims with 2022 injury dates – more than double the proportion noted for AY 2021, when COVID claims represented 11.7 percent of all reported California workers' comp claims.



Comparing details on COVID claims from the November through January 2021 Omicron surge to those from February through April of 2022 reveals that as COVID claim volume was plummeting from the recent peak, there were some major shifts within the COVID claim population.

One of the most notable changes that began in February was a shift in the regional distribution of COVID claims within California. Much of the November through January Omicron surge in COVID claims involved claimants who lived in and around the Los Angeles Basin as Los Angeles County had 18,555 reported COVID claims during that 3-month span (23.4 percent of the 79,317 statewide total for the period), while the Inland Empire/Orange County ranked second with 17,765 (22.4 percent). But as COVID claim counts statewide tumbled to just 8,187 claims during the February through April period, L.A. County saw its total fall to 1,307 claims, down 93.0 percent from the prior 3-month period, while the Inland Empire/Orange County COVID claim count fell by 93.5 percent to 1,152 claims. Every other region of the state also registered huge declines in their COVID claim numbers in the wake of the Omicron surge, but not to the same degree as L.A. County and the Inland Empire/Orange County, which led to a shake up in the regional rankings for COVID claims. The Central Valley surpassed every other region of the state as its 88.0 percent decline (from 16,875 COVID claims to 2,030) was less than the statewide decline, while the Bay Area jumped from the number 4 spot to the number 2 spot in the regional rankings as its COVID claim tally fell 85.0 percent from 12,594 to 1,894, which also lagged the statewide figure. San Diego's 89.3 percent decline in COVID claims nearly matched the statewide decline, as it remained the number 5 region in the state for COVID claims, ranking ahead of the much smaller Central Coast, North Counties/Sierras and out-of-state COVID claims.

The distribution of COVID claims by industry shows that public safety/government workers accounted for more than a third of the COVID claims during both periods, and health care workers accounted for about 23 percent. Among other sectors, however, retail workers' share increased from 9.4 percent to 13.2 percent and manufacturing workers' share increased from 4.3 percent to 6.0 percent, while transportation workers' share fell from 6.6 percent to 2.6 percent. The prevalence of COVID claims among public safety officers and health care workers, many of whom have a presumption of compensability for COVID, is also evident in the breakdown of COVID clams filed by self-insured and insured employees. Among the November to January COVID claims, 60.5 percent involved workers employed by self-insured entities including the state, local municipalities, joint powers authorities, and public and private hospitals, while 39.5 percent came from workers employed by insured entities. Although COVID claim volume peaked in January, in the subsequent three-month period the percentage of COVID claims filed against public entities rose to 62.3 percent while insured employers' share fell to 37.7 percent.

As has been the case since the pandemic began, the latest demographic data show that males account for a majority of the COVID claims, with men representing 54.5 percent of the COVID claimants over the most recent six-month period, and women representing 45.5 percent. However, the 45.5 percent share of the COVID claims filed by women is above their 43.4 percent share of non-COVID claims, which likely reflects the prevalence of COVID claims within the health care and retail sectors, where females make up a majority of the workforce. The distribution of COVID claims by claimant age shows a shift following the January peak, as workers who were age 50 or above saw their share of the COVID claims increase from one out of five claims (20.1 percent) during the November through January Omicron surge to one out four claims (25.1 percent) when the surge subsided during the February through April period. In contrast, during these same periods workers who were 50 or over saw virtually no change in their share of the non-COVID claims, as they represented just over 30 percent of non-COVID claims both during and after the Omicron surge.

CWCI continues to update its COVID-19/Non-COVID-19 app on a biweekly basis. The application is available to the public, so anyone who wishes to monitor and compare COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 claim experience over time can access the app from the CWCI website by clicking here.

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