California Workers' Compensation Institute

1999 Harrison Street, Suite 2100, Oakland CA 94612
(510) 251-9470
www.cwci.org

BULLETIN

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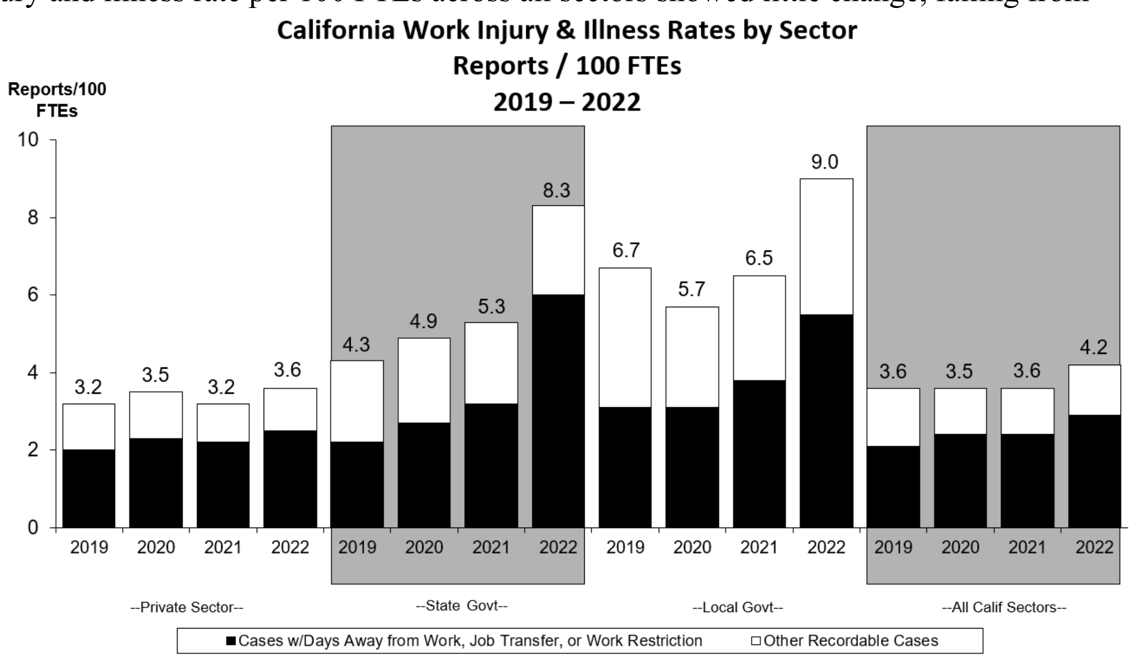
After declining to roughly 450,000 cases a year in the first two years of the pandemic, the number of nonfatal work injuries and illnesses in California jumped 25.6 percent to 565,900 cases in 2022 as statewide employment rebounded and required reporting of COVID-19 infections at work sites pushed the nonfatal work injury and illness rate per 100 full-time employees (FTEs) back above the pre-pandemic level.

Data posted by the Department of Industrial Relations Director's Office of Research provide the latest estimates from the California Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (SOII), which are based on reports to OSHA from a statistical sample of employers in the state. The SOII program is administered by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in cooperation with the DIR and provides an alternate view of the state's work injury and illness experience than workers' compensation claim counts, as the survey includes cases reported by employers for which workers' compensation claims may or may not have been filed. Rather than counting indemnity and medical-only claims, the survey tallies cases that resulted in days away from work, as well as those that resulted in restricted work activity or job transfer ("DART" cases); and those that were not DART cases but were 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 2022 survey estimate of 565,900 nonfatal work injuries and illness reports from California public and private employers was 115,400 more than the 2021 total, 117,600 more than the total for 2020 (the initial year of the pandemic), and 82,600 more than the total for the final pre-pandemic year of 2019. The impact of pandemic-driven job losses is evident, as the number of work injuries and illnesses fell as the state's unemployment rate soared from 4.1 percent in 2019 to 10.1 percent in 2020, then edged up slightly as the unemployment rate fell to 7.3 percent in 2021, before surging more than 25 percent as the unemployment rate plunged to 4.2 percent last year.

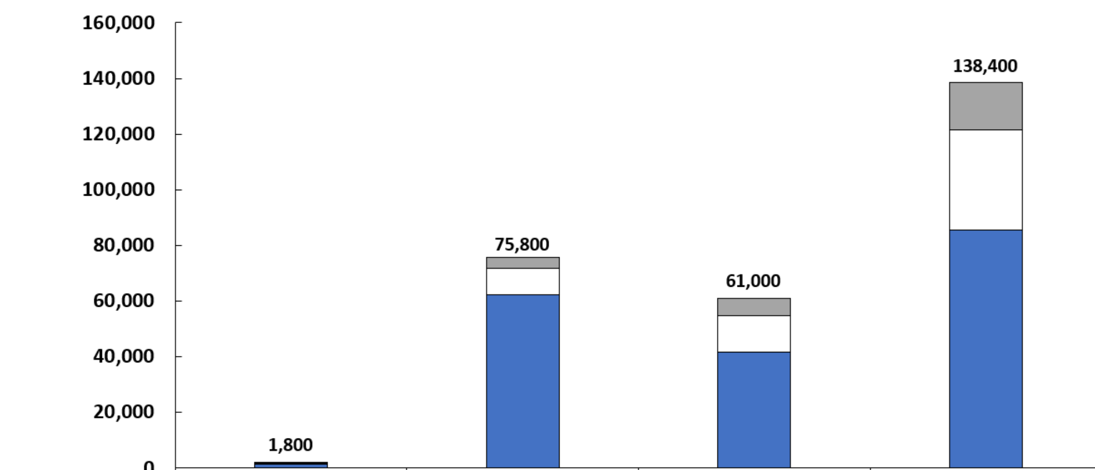
The changes in the number of work injuries and illnesses in 2020 and 2021 largely tracked with the employment changes, so the work injury and illness rate per 100 FTEs across all sectors showed little change, falling from 3.6 in 2019 to 3.5 in 2020, then moving back up to 3.6 as more employees returned to work in 2021. Employment continued to rebound in 2022, but growth in the number of reported work injuries and illnesses far outpaced job growth, driving the overall work injury and illness rate up to 4.2 cases per 100 FTEs, with sharp increases in the work injury and illness rates for state and local government workers who were especially hard hit by COVID.



Comparing the mix of recordable injuries and illnesses over the past four years shows the shift in the types of cases, as 68.7 percent (388,600) of the 2022 cases were DART cases, up from 66.5 percent in 2021, 66.0 percent in 2020, and 58.9 percent in 2019, while at the same time "other recordable cases" accounted for a declining share of the cases. As noted, the distribution of California work injuries and illness cases among private sector, local government, and state government workers also shifted, as the number of cases per 100 FTEs in the private sector increased from 3.2 in 2019 to 3.6 in 2022; while the rate for state employees' nearly doubled from 4.3 to 8.3, and the local government sector, which includes many public safety officers, teachers, and transit workers, and which was the only sector with a declining work injury and illness rate in 2020, saw a surge in reportable cases over the past two years, so its rate went from 6.7 in 2019 to 9.0 in 2022.

With the addition of COVID cases into the occupational illness mix, the number of work-related illness cases in California soared from 24,800 cases in 2019 to 111,000 in 2020, then retreated to 88,700 cases in 2021 before climbing to 162,600 cases last year.

Total Number of Employer-Reported Respiratory Conditions in California, 2019 – 2022



	2019	2020	2021	2022
State Government	100	4,100	6,400	16,800
Local Government	300	9,200	12,900	36,100
Private Sector	1,400	62,400	41,700	85,500

The breakdown by illness category points to increased COVID reporting as the reason for the surge in occupational illnesses, with the increase in illness cases in the state fueled by a nearly 7,600 percent increase in employer-reported respiratory illness cases, as the number of these cases jumped from 1,800 in 2019 to 138,400 in 2022, when they represented 85.1 percent of all reported occupational illnesses, while the incidence of work-related respiratory illness reports jumped from 1.4 to 103.6 cases per 10,000 FTEs.

Nationwide, BLS data show the impact of COVID on work injury and illness volume across the country and in specific industries. For example, the number of respiratory illnesses in the private health care/social assistance sector in the U.S. increased 37.5 percent from 145,300 cases in 2021 to 199,700 cases in 2022, while the rate of respiratory illnesses among grocery workers nearly tripled from 66.8 cases to 190.4 cases per 10,000 FTEs. BLS also reports that in 2021 and 2022, there were 560,750 private sector days away from work cases due to "other diseases due to viruses, not elsewhere classified," the code used for COVID. These cases occurred at an annualized rate of 28.2 cases per 10,000 FTEs, resulting in a median of 10 days away from work, with over half of the days away from work cases (308,500 cases) occurring in the health care/social assistance industry sector.

More details and data tables from the 2022 nonfatal injury and illness surveys for California are posted on the DIR Director's Office of Research webpage here. The BLS news release on nationwide results for 2022 is here.

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