



BULLETIN

No. 26-03

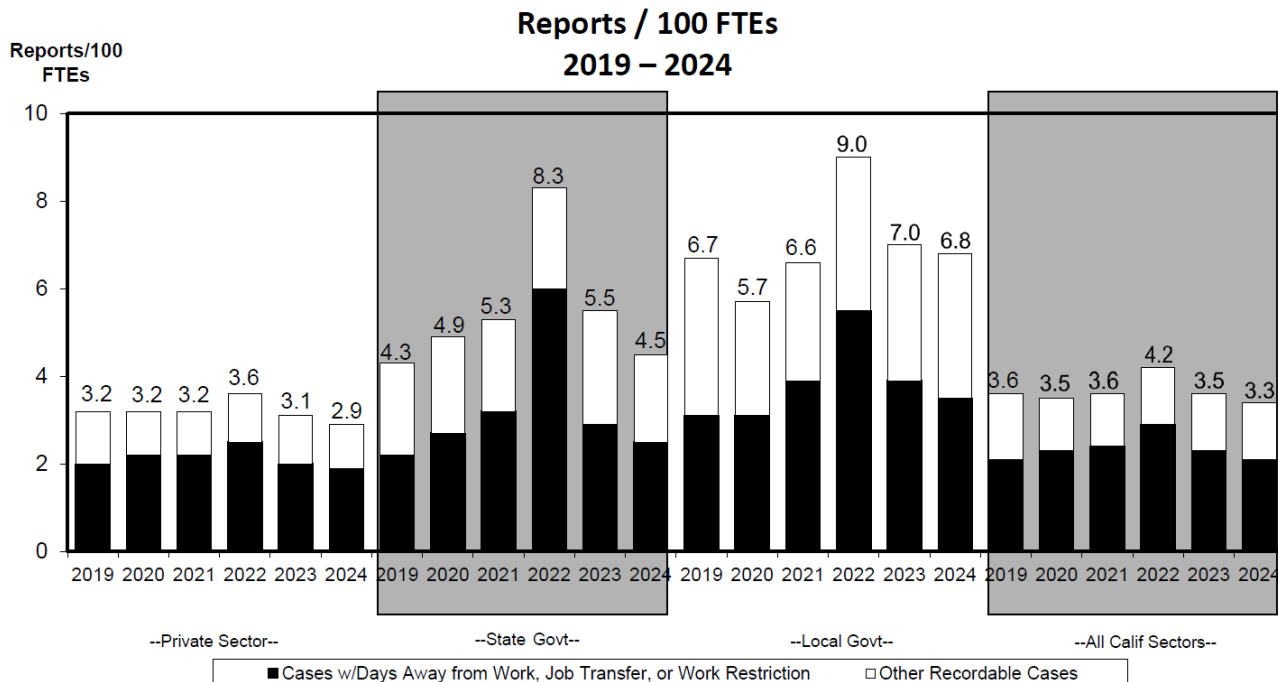
February 13, 2026

After climbing 25.6 percent to 565,900 cases in 2022 as the state's economy rebounded from the COVID-19 recession, the number of nonfatal work-related injuries and illnesses in California fell back to pre-pandemic levels, dropping nearly 20 percent over two years to 454,100 cases in 2024 according to the latest data from the state Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) Director's Office of Research.

The new data come from the California Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (SOII), administered by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in cooperation with DIR. The SOII is based on reports submitted to OSHA by a statistical sample of California employers from the public and private sectors. Compared to workers' comp data, the SOII provides a broader picture of workplace safety by capturing employer-reported cases regardless of whether a workers' comp claim was filed. Rather than counting indemnity and medical-only claims, the survey tracks reported injuries that resulted in Days Away from Work, Restricted, or Transfer ("DART" cases) and Other Recordable Cases, which involve treatment beyond first aid or a diagnosis of a significant injury or illness recorded on employers' OSHA incident logs.

DIR's latest update shows total work injury and illness case counts fluctuated sharply over the six-year period ending in 2024. Estimated cases fell from 483,300 in 2019 (the final pre-pandemic year) to about 450,000 in both 2020 and 2021, the first two years of the pandemic. They then surged to 565,900 in 2022 before retreating to 472,500 in 2023 and 454,100 in 2024. These shifts partly reflected changes in California's labor market, as job injury and illness case counts generally moved inversely with the state's unemployment rate before, during, and after the pandemic and EDD reports that California's annual average unemployment rate rose from 4.1 percent in 2019 to 9.0 percent in 2020 and 8.7 percent in 2021, then fell to 3.8 percent in 2022 before increasing to 4.7 percent in 2023 and 5.3 percent in 2024. However, the dramatic fluctuations also track with changes in the volume of reported COVID-19 infections at work sites. In 2022, a record number of COVID-19 cases drove the state's nonfatal work injury and illness rate to a historic level as employers reported 4.2 cases per 100 full-time equivalent workers (FTEs), up from 3.6 cases per 100 FTEs in 2019. As workplace COVID-19 cases declined in the two most recent years, the rate fell to 3.5 in 2023 and 3.3 in 2024.

California Work Injury & Illness Rates by Sector



A breakdown of the injury and illness rate by sector shows that the 2022 increase was most pronounced in the public sector, where workers faced elevated exposure risks from COVID-19. Between 2019 and 2022 the private sector rate rose from 3.2 to 3.6 cases per 100 FTEs; the state government rate nearly doubled from 4.3 to 8.3 cases per 100 FTEs; and the local government rate, which includes public safety officers, teachers, and transit workers, climbed from 6.7 to 9.0 cases per 100 FTEs. Local government was the only sector to register a decline in injury and illness rates in 2020, likely reflecting the closure of public schools during much of that first year of the pandemic. However, the local government injury and illness rate rebounded sharply over the next two years, and injury and illness rates across all sectors peaked in 2022 before falling back below or near pre-pandemic levels by 2024.

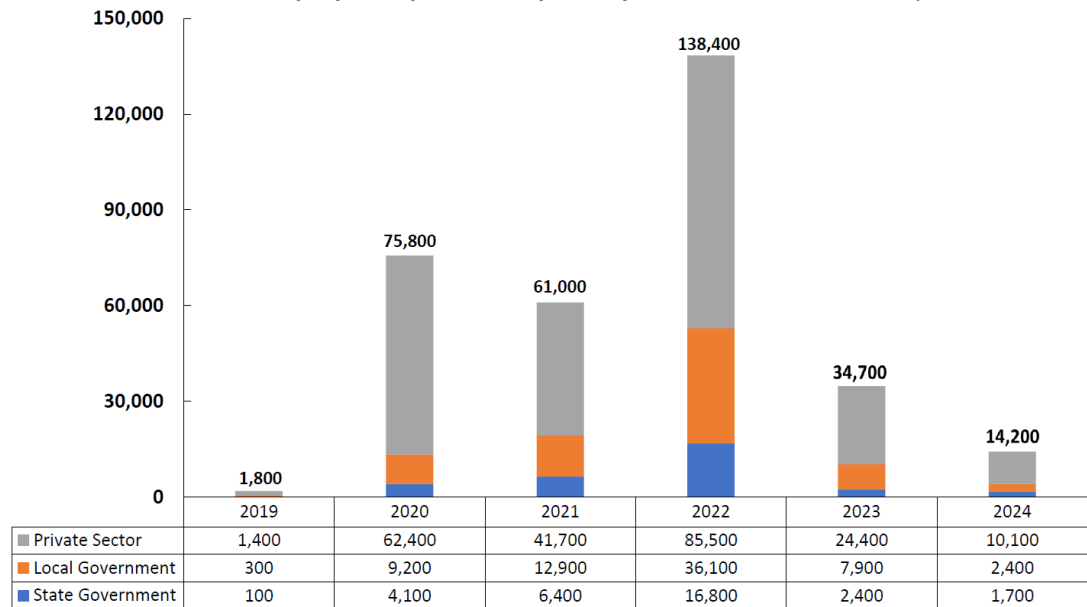
The mix of reported injuries and illnesses also shifted over the six-year period. In 2019, prior to the pandemic, 58.9 percent of all cases were classified as DART cases. In 2020, the first year in which COVID-19 was reported as a work-related illness, that percentage jumped to 66.0 percent, then edged up to 66.5 percent in 2021, before peaking at 68.7 percent in 2022. This pattern reflects a pandemic-era shift toward work injuries and illnesses resulting in lost time or job restrictions. In 2023, the year the pandemic was declared over, DART claims declined to 62.8 percent of the reported work injuries and illnesses, and that decline continued in 2024, when 62.0 percent of all cases were classified as DART cases. Conversely, “other recordable cases” accounted for a growing share of the reported cases in the two most recent years, indicating a shift back toward job injuries and illnesses that do not result in lost work time or job restrictions.

Overall, the 2019-2024 fluctuations in the California SOII results were largely driven by changes in the volume of work-related illness cases, which surged due to COVID-19 reporting then declined as the pandemic subsided. California employers reported an estimated 24,800 occupational illness cases in 2019, but that number soared to 111,000 cases in 2020, 88,700 cases in 2021, and 162,600 in 2022. In 2023, reported occupational illnesses plummeted by more than 100,000 cases to 62,500, and fell further to 39,500 in 2024.

The SOII “category of illness” data further bolster the finding that the recent changes in the number of reported occupational illnesses were primarily due to COVID-19.

Employer-reported respiratory illness cases jumped from 1,800 in 2019 to 138,400 in 2022, a nearly 7,600 percent increase. At their peak in 2022, respiratory illnesses accounted for 85.1 percent of all

Total Number of Employer-Reported Respiratory Conditions in California, 2019 – 2024



occupational illness cases statewide, but by 2024, that share had fallen to 35.7 percent. Measured as a frequency, the respiratory illness rate per 10,000 FTEs rose from 1.4 cases in 2019 to 103.6 in 2022, before declining to 10.3 in 2024.

More details and data tables from the 2024 nonfatal occupational injury and illness survey for California are posted on the DIR Director’s Office of Research webpage [here](#).

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