Work Leave Durations for Workers Quarantined or Ill with Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

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Introduction

As of June 1st, 2020, the United States has recorded 1.79 million COVID-19 cases that resulted in 104,396 deaths. The novel coronavirus global pandemic has caused substantial disruption to all aspects of society, including the ability to work. Workers have been unable to work for a variety of reasons, including state-mandated shelter-in-place orders, risk of exposure to the coronavirus, testing positive for COVID-19, having symptoms of or being hospitalized for the illness, caring for a loved one who is sick, or providing care for children unable to attend school.

Methods

To better understand workers' leave experiences due to COVID-19, we explored the number of days an employee was out of work due to COVID-19. These were workers who had employer-sponsored disability insurance or another sick leave policies that allowed them to be paid a portion of their salary during their work leave. The claims analyzed were from late January to early May 2020.

We analyzed workers in the following case categories: 1) workers diagnosed with COVID-19, 2) workers suspected but not diagnosed with COVID-19, 3) workers quarantined due to exposure to someone with confirmed COVID-19, and 4) workers quarantined due to fear of contracting COVID-19 because they are in an at-risk population. For workers with a COVID-19 diagnosis, we explored how age and gender influenced disability duration.

Work and Leave Duration Summary Statistics for Workers Taking a Disability Leave for COVID-10
By Case Category:

Group	25th %ile Duration (Days)	Median Leave Duration (Days)	Average Leave Duration (Days)	75th %ile Duration (Days)
Diagnosed with COVID-19	14	21	25	31
Suspected COVID-19	13	14	19	21
Quarantine Due to Exposure	14	14	18	19
Quarantine Due to Fear/ At Risk	14	28	34	51

The median work leave duration for workers diagnosed with COVID-19 was 21 days. The leave durations for workers diagnosed with COVID-19 are similar to MDGuidelines' duration benchmarks for viral pneumonia (median = 21 days), but longer than our benchmarks for seasonal flu (median = 13 days).

Results

Approximately 6,000 employees took an employee health leave due to being out on quarantine, diagnosed with COVID-19, or suspected of having COVID-19. By case category, 31.1% of the workers were out on a sick leave for quarantine due to exposure, 30.2% were out to quarantine due to fear of contracting, 25.3% were diagnosed with COVID-19, and 13.3% were suspected but not diagnosed with COVID-19. Workers quarantined due to exposure typically had the shortest durations (median = 14 days) and workers quarantined due to fear of contracting typically had the longest durations (median = 28 days, Table 1).
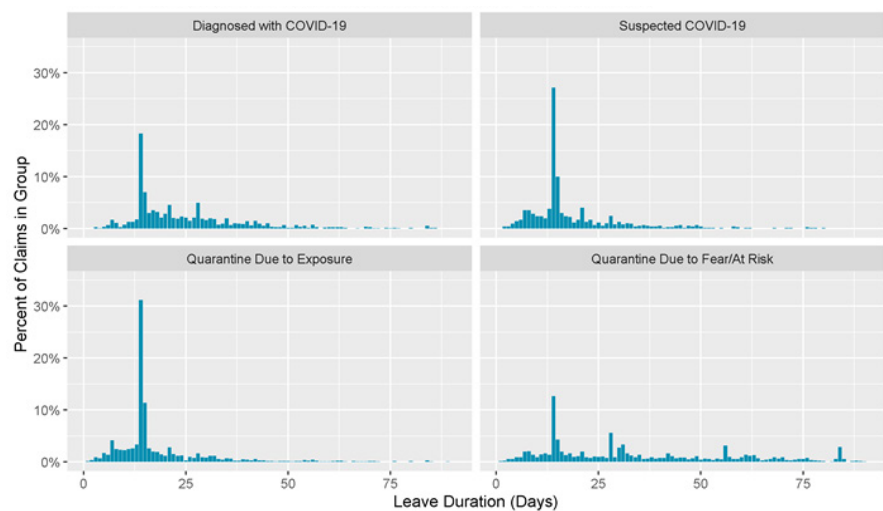
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For workers diagnosed with COVID-19, the length of disability was associated with the age of the worker (Kruskal-Wallis p-value < 0.001, Table 2). For example, the median leave duration for workers between 20 and 29 years old was 16 days compared to 28 days for workers between 60 and 69 years old. The gender of diagnosed workers was moderately associated with leave duration, with females out longer than males (medians = 21 days vs 20 days, Kruskal-Wallis p-value = 0.01).

The longest work leave durations were observed for workers quarantined due to fear of contracting COVID-19 because they are in an at-risk population (median = 28 days). Future research should explore what factors contributed to these workers feeling safe to return to work.

COVID-19: Distribution of Work Leave Durations by Case Category

For workers quarantined due to exposure to someone with confirmed COVID-19, 45.8 % were on leave for 14 days (±1 day), which is consistent with the CDC's 14-day recommendation to quarantine after known exposure prior to returning to work.

Additional Resources:

To aid in the rapid and full recovery of workers ill with COVID-19, MDGuidelines has made the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM)'s evidence-based clinical practice guidelines for COVID-19 freely available to assist in treatment decision-making. In addition, ReedGroup has provided open access to an extensive resource center to help employers manage the care of exposed or ill employees.

	25th %ile Duration (Days)	Median Leave Duration (Days)	Average Leave Duration (Days)	75th %ile Duration (Days)
Age of Worker				
20-29 Years	14	16	20	24
30-39 Years	14	18	23	28
40-49 Years	14	21	25	31
50-59 Years	14	23	27	35
60-69 Years	21	28	32	42
Gender of Worker				
Female	14	21	26	32
Male	14	20	24	28

Age was significantly associated with the leave durations for workers diagnosed with COVID-19. For example, workers between 60 and 69 years old had durations 1.75 times higher than durations for workers between 20 and 29 years old.

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