

NALC and OWCP team up to help COVID-19 victims



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Just when we thought we had COVID-19 on the ropes, the virus continues to mutate and become more virulent. After a long, slow decline in positive infections, positive cases among Postal Service employees are rising. And despite the rising numbers of vaccinated workers, there is a very real threat of the virus becoming more communicable and deadly.

During this time last year, the number of positive diagnoses started rising rapidly, reaching a peak last December and January, our busiest season. So far, more than 57,000 Postal Service employees, including 17,000 city letter carriers, have tested positive for the virus.

NALC has teamed with the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) to reach out to letter carriers who have tested positive for COVID-19. Both NALC and OWCP are concerned that only a small percentage of letter carriers who tested positive for the virus have filed workers' compensation claims with OWCP.

The long-term effects of COVID-19 are relatively unknown. NALC and OWCP want to encourage every letter carrier who has tested positive for COVID-19 or shown symptoms of the disease to file a claim.

Getting a claim accepted will protect you should you suffer future medical and/or financial effects. In the event that you develop a consequential injury, impairment or condition later as a result of your coronavirus infection, filing a claim now will facilitate the processing of any future claim for any such consequential condition or impairment.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, signed by President Biden on March 11, makes it much easier for federal and postal employees diagnosed with COVID-19 to have a claim accepted under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act.

OWCP has streamlined the COVID-19 claims processing, making it easier to file a claim and get it accepted. OWCP considers COVID-19 to be a traumatic injury, since it is contracted during a single workday or shift. COVID-19 claims should be filed via the Employees' Compensation and Management Portal (ECOMP).

The form filing process in ECOMP has been updated to assist claimants with filing claims for COVID-19 on a CA-1. The CA-1 for COVID-19 claims form has been modified and the claimant is provided with specific instructions to supplement the routine claim filing questions.

To qualify under the ARPA, you must have worked within 21 days prior to becoming symptomatic or testing positive for the virus. While existing medical literature sug-

gests that the incubation period of COVID-19 is between two and 14 days, the use of 21 days acknowledges a potential delay in seeking professional medical evaluation and treatment.

In order to establish a diagnosis of COVID-19, you must submit a positive polymerase chain reaction (PCR) COVID-19 test result or a positive antibody or antigen COVID-19 test result, together with contemporaneous medical evidence that you had documented symptoms of and/or were treated for COVID-19 by a physician (a notice to quarantine is not sufficient if there was no evidence of illness).

If no positive laboratory test is available, a COVID-19 diagnosis from a physician with a medical opinion supporting the diagnosis and an explanation as to why a positive test result is not available will suffice.

In certain rare instances, a physician may provide an opinion with supporting factual and medical background as to why you were diagnosed with COVID-19, even if you have a negative or series of negative COVID-19 test results. Medical reports from nurses or physician assistants are acceptable if a licensed physician cosigns the report.

Getting a COVID-19 claim accepted under the ARPA is not difficult. In addition to the medical evidence, you need a short explanation that you physically interacted with at least one other person at work or on the route. The interaction does not have to be direct physical contact, nor is there a specified time for such interaction; any duration qualifies. If a letter carrier who comes in contact with co-workers or members of the public was previously diagnosed with COVID-19, or even if they believe they just had a mild case of COVID-19, they should consider filing a COVID-19 claim now—even if they have fully recovered and/or had an asymptomatic infection.

Scanning the QR code below will take you to the ECOMP registration page, where you can begin the process of registering and filing a claim. If you have any problems filing your claim, please call your national business agent's office and ask for a referral to a regional workers' compensation assistant.



Did you hear it's Easier to File a FECA Claim for COVID-19 now?

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 that President Biden signed on March 11, 2021, makes it **much easier** for federal workers diagnosed with COVID-19 to establish coverage under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act. To establish a COVID-19 claim, you simply need to establish that you are a "covered employee," meaning that:

1. **You were diagnosed with COVID-19.** Specifically, you were diagnosed with COVID-19 while employed in the Federal service at any time during the period of January 27, 2020 to January 27, 2023; and,
2. **Your duties include any risk of exposure.** Specifically, within **21** days of your diagnosis of COVID-19, you carried out duties that—
 - a. required contact with patients, members of the public, or co-workers; or
 - b. included a risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus.



What Does the Change in the Law Mean?

1. **You are only required to establish that your duties included a risk of exposure to COVID-19.** You do not have to prove you were engaged in high-risk employment; that you were actually exposed to the virus; or that you were exposed to someone who had the virus while performing your duties.
2. **If you establish that you are a "covered employee," any diagnosed COVID-19 will be deemed to have been proximately caused by your Federal employment.** You no longer have to establish a causal link between your employment and your COVID-19 diagnosis.



What to Do:

You can quickly and easily file a **CA-1** Claim for COVID-19 through the Employees' Compensation Operations and Management Portal (ECOMP). You can access ECOMP at ecomp.dol.gov. If you have never used ECOMP, you can [view this instructional video](#) to learn how to register for an ECOMP account, [and this video](#) to learn how to file a COVID-19 claim. If you don't have access to a computer, contact your supervisor.



Why File Now? What if I Think I Am OK?

If you were previously diagnosed with COVID-19 or even if you believe you just have a mild case of COVID-19, you should consider filing a COVID-19 FECA claim **now** even if you have fully recovered and/or had an asymptomatic infection.

- In the event you develop a consequential injury, impairment or illness later as a result of your COVID-19 diagnosis, timely filing your claim **now** will facilitate the processing of any future claim for any such consequential condition or impairment.
- If you wait until you experience a consequential injury or illness to file your COVID-19 claim, your claim may be subject to time limitation and you will have to establish **both** the initial COVID-19 claim and the consequential condition claim before benefits can begin.