



## Declines in Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders

Work-related musculoskeletal disorder surveillance using the Washington state workers' compensation system: Recent declines and patterns by industry, 1999–2013

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### Overview

Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs), such as carpal tunnel syndrome or tendonitis, are common and costly, and often have longer and more severe outcomes than other workplace injuries. WMSDs are preventable.

This study used Washington State workers' compensation claim data from 1999–2013 to describe recent trends in WMSD incidence, severity and cost.

WMSD risk differs by industry. Industries were ranked for WMSD risk using a "Prevention Index" (PI). The PI ranks industries by claim count (how common industries are) and claim incidence rate (risk for injury). This research also explored industry differences in WMSD claims by exposure type and by affected body area.

### Key Findings

- Over 40% of all compensable claims were due to WMSDs.
- Overall, WMSD claims declined an estimated 5.4% each year over the study period—a greater rate of decline than for claims from other types of injury.
- Claim incidence, severity, and cost differed by affected body area:
  - Claim rates for WMSDs of the back were consistently higher than for other body areas, declined at the fastest rate (7.4%), and had the lowest median claim cost (\$5,854).
  - Shoulder WMSD claims were second most common, but declined at the slowest rate (1.5%) and had relatively high claim costs (\$28,563).
- The industry sectors at highest risk for WMSDs by PI were:
  - Construction
  - Transportation and Warehousing
  - Health Care and Social Assistance
  - Manufacturing
  - Public Administration
- Across industry, nearly three-quarters of all WMSD claims were caused by overexertion, with lifting being the most common activity.

### Impact

WMSDs continue to be a leading cause of work-related disability, despite a steady decline in workers' compensation claims rates over the last fifteen years. These declines may indicate increases in workplace safety and reduced exposures, however factors such as injury underreporting, surveillance limitations, and shifts in health care utilization may also play a role.

Find the article here:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ajim.22708/abstract>

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### Research for Safe Work

The SHARP Program at the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries partners with business and labor to develop sensible, effective solutions to identify and eliminate industry-wide hazards. Learn more at [www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/](http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/)