

# Coronavirus fears kept many essential workers at home in April, study finds

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(HealthDay)—Many more American workers caring for children, the

sick or aged, as well as bus drivers, subway workers and those involved in food production took time off work in April—probably due to fears of contracting COVID-19, a new government report finds.

In an analysis of federal employment data on work absenteeism from October 2019 until the end of April 2020, researchers found that absenteeism for American workers overall didn't change as the coronavirus pandemic took hold.

But that was not the case for certain essential service workers who did not have the option of working from home, the study found.

"Absenteeism among workers in several [occupation-specific] groups that define or contain essential critical infrastructure workforce categories was significantly higher than expected in April," said a team led by Matthew Groenewold, of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In some job categories that millions of Americans rely on to function each day, [worker](#) absenteeism shot up in April.

These included:

- Childcare workers and personal care workers, with an expected absenteeism rate of 2.1% but an actual rate of 5% in April;
- Health care support workers, with an expected absenteeism rate of 2.4% but an actual rate of 5%;
- Health care practitioners and technicians, with an expected absenteeism rate of 1.9% but an actual rate of 2.8%;
- Food (meat, poultry, fish) processing workers, with an expected absenteeism rate of 2.3% but an actual rate of 3.7%;
- Public transport workers (bus drivers, subway/streetcar workers),

with an expected [absenteeism](#) rate of 2.5% but an actual rate of 3.6%.

Groenewold's group noted that many of the jobs affected by higher work days taken off in April "involve prolonged close contact with patients, the general public or co-workers."

Those jobs typically couldn't be performed remotely or at home, and that meant that going into work every day put these workers "at increased risk for occupational exposure to SARS-CoV-2," the new coronavirus, the researchers said.

The findings were published in the July 10 issue of the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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