The Workplace
COVID-19: Science Will Lead the Way to Reopening Economy

In Episode 64 of The Workplace podcast, CalChamber President and CEO Allan Zaremberg and Richard Moscicki, M.D., chief medical officer and executive vice president of science and regulatory advocacy for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), discuss how increased testing, medical treatments and vaccines can provide short-, middle- and long-term solutions to battling the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and reopening the economy.

Below is a condensed summary of the podcast. To hear the full discussion of each topic, visit the time stamps noted in the article below.

Short-Term Solution: Testing
(Time Discussed: 03:30)
The answer to the question of how the economy can effectively be reopened will come through science, Zaremberg says.

In the short term, widespread testing is needed to not only determine where the virus is, but also where the virus has been, Zaremberg explains.

In the early days of the pandemic, Moscicki tells listeners, COVID-19 testing was more “artisanal,” being done by...
Labor Law Corner

Reasonable Accommodations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

How have the interactive process and reasonable accommodations for disabilities changed due to COVID-19?

As COVID-19 changes the employment law landscape, government agencies continue to provide guidance on many commonplace compliance issues that are now causing confusion for employers. Recently, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) revised its COVID-19 guidance for employers responding to requests for reasonable accommodations.

At-Risk Employees

Although state and county public health orders have shuttered some businesses or forced others into remote enterprises, many businesses deemed “essential” are still publicly operating. These public health orders consistently caution those individuals with underlying health conditions about the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

In response, the EEOC recognizes that, even with the pandemic constraints, employers may have reasonable accommodations that they can provide to employees with underlying disabilities. Reasonable accommodations that employers should explore include:

- Temporary barriers or one-way routes through the workplace to create distance between coworkers and customers;
- Modifying fringe job duties to limit movement and exposure in the workplace; or
- Creating modified work schedules or temporary transfers to the extent they do not create an undue hardship.

Employees with Mental Health Disabilities

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused stress, anxiety and even panic in individuals who have never experienced these mental health issues. For employees with pre-existing mental health disabilities, the pandemic and its consequences may exacerbate those conditions.

Employers should explore the following accommodations when employees return to the worksite.

- Creating modified work schedules or temporary transfers to the extent they do not create an undue hardship.

The EEOC reminds employers of their obligation to engage in the interactive process while also reaffirming their ability to seek information from the employee, such as how the accommodation would assist the employee in performing their essential duties and requesting medical certifications.

Responding to Future Requests

As employers have shifted to remote working arrangements, some employees with disabilities may not have a need for accommodation under these circumstances. However, because these arrangements are intended to be temporary, employers need to plan for resolving accommodation requests after employees return to the worksite.

The EEOC states that an employer may prioritize reasonable accommodation requests based on immediate need, but it may also discuss and plan for an accommodation when employees return to the worksite.

The employer should keep in mind its ongoing obligation to engage in the interactive process when evaluating future accommodation requests and stay in communication with the employee about the future request.

Additional or Altered Reasonable Accommodations

Our evolving working arrangements may require a disabled employee to receive reasonable accommodations, in addition to or different from accommodations they already may receive. The EEOC states that an employer may prioritize reasonable accommodation requests based on immediate need, but it may also discuss and plan for an accommodation when employees return to the worksite.

The employer should keep in mind its ongoing obligation to engage in the interactive process when evaluating future accommodation requests and stay in communication with the employee about the future request.

See Reasonable Accommodations: Page 5
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On-Call Rules to Know to Avoid Liability

In Episode 63 of The Workplace podcast, CalChamber Executive Vice President and General Counsel Erika Frank and employment law expert Jennifer Shaw discuss the difference between “restricted” and “unrestricted” on-call shifts, and what issues may arise with the Paycheck Protection Program if employers place workers on on-call shifts.

Restricted vs. Unrestricted

As more employees are allowed to work from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic and shelter-in-place county ordinances, employers may find that not all positions have enough work to complete full-time hours, Frank says. To balance company needs, some employees are being shifted to on-call status, working only if the company expects hours at a particular time.

Wage and hour issues may arise, however, if an employer doesn’t understand the difference between “restricted” and “unrestricted” on-call shifts.

Shaw explains that a restricted on-call shift is when an employer sets restrictions on when an employee should report to work. For example, if an employer requires that an employee work within 30 minutes of being asked to do so, or if an employer requires that an employee not drink alcoholic beverages the day before they are called to work, the shift is deemed as restrictive on call.

“The more we are limiting the employee’s ability to pursue their personal pursuits, which is the phrase that is used under the law, the more likely the time will be considered restricted and therefore must be paid at the applicable minimum wage rate,” Shaw says.

If an employer, however, does not restrict an employee’s time, the employer is required to pay only for actual hours worked. For example, Shaw says, if a manager tells an employee that hours may be available on Thursday and it’s fine if they don’t answer the call to work, then the on-call shift is unrestricted and the company does not need to compensate the employee for the time.

Another situation that creates wage and hour issues is if an employer requires workers to call at a certain time to check to see if there will be hours available, Shaw explains. For example, if an employer requires a worker to call at 8 a.m. to check if they must report to work at 11 a.m., and the worker is asked to report to work, the employer must compensate for the gap hours between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m., in essence paying an employee to wait.

“It’s a ‘sort of’ shift,” Shaw says, because the shift technically began at 8 a.m.

Given that most people are staying home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Frank asks Shaw if on-call rules are affected if an employee who works remotely cannot leave their home due to shelter-in-place ordinances.

Shaw replies that in this scenario, employers are not the reason an employee’s actions and movements are restricted. It does not apply to employers, she says.

Paycheck Protection Program

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) reimburses businesses for payroll expenses during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and incentivizes businesses to keep employees on the payroll, even if the business has to close up shop due to shelter-in-place ordinances.

This may mean paying people to do nothing, Shaw says.

Putting employees on on-call shifts can complicate matters for companies that seek payroll reimbursement through the PPP.

Some employers may think that simply putting people on on-call shifts will meet PPP requirements to “maintain payroll,” but the PPP will look at if an employer is actually paying the payroll, Shaw explains.

Shaw points out that there are many payroll questions which still need to be addressed under the PPP, such as what if someone quits or what if an employer has to fire someone due to performance issues? Much of the rules under the PPP are still fluid, and there has not been much guidance on these issues.

And because rules are still so fluid and open to interpretation, Frank cautions employers to be careful of the information they are listening to and following. It’s important to follow credible sources, she emphasizes.

Resources Available


The California Chamber of Commerce also provides an up-to-date COVID-19 resource page that lists relevant information for California employers, including links to county websites, at www.calchamber.com/coronavirus.

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State Gives Update on COVID-19 Testing, Contact Tracing Efforts

The status of California’s efforts to expand testing for COVID-19 and contact tracing were one focus of the Governor’s April 22 briefing.

Expanding testing and contact tracing to be able to identify and isolate persons with the COVID-19 virus is the first of the six indicators Governor Gavin Newsom has identified as providing the framework for gradually modifying California’s stay-at-home order.

At the briefing, the Governor announced that President Donald J. Trump has personally committed to sending the state 100,000 testing swabs next week and 250,000 swabs the following week. A shortage of swabs had been identified as one of the factors limiting the number of COVID-19 tests that could be performed.

More Community Testing

The state will be expanding community testing in underserved rural and urban areas, according to the Governor’s office.

The state is contracting with Verily, an Alphabet company, in partnership with Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE) and with support from the Rockefeller Foundation and an anonymous donor, to establish six new community testing sites focused on underserved communities, such as farmworkers and communities of color.

In addition, the state is contracting with OptumServe to establish an additional 80 community testing sites, which also will be focused on underserved communities.

Other expanded testing efforts include:

- Accelerating equitable COVID-19 testing by aiming to deploy 25,000 tests per day by April 30; establishing an additional 80–100 testing sites; and identifying five new high-throughput testing hubs.

- Establishing a contact tracing workforce by surveying counties on their capacity; developing a statewide online training academy; and training 10,000 public health connectors to conduct contact tracing. The contact tracing will build on the existing program of tracking and tracing contacts for other illnesses.

- Developing isolation protocols and supports by identifying regional alternate isolation sites and building private-public partnerships to support those who are isolated.

- Deploying data management system and tools by publishing a symptom-check app; deploying a data management platform; and establishing a data dashboard for the public.

Earlier this week, the California Department of Public Health updated its testing guidance to recommend testing of some asymptomatic individuals, such as health care workers, first responders and correctional workers.

The Governor reiterated that the constant monitoring of conditions “on the ground” means “there is no light switch and there is no date” for when the stay-at-home order will be lifted.

Strong CalChamber Presence on Jobs Recovery Task Force

From Page 1

Elected officials on the task force are

- Former Governors Edmund G. Brown Jr., Arnold Schwarzenegger, Gray Davis and Pete Wilson

- Honorary task force members are

- Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis, Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins, Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, Senate Minority Leader Shannon Grove and Assembly Minority Leader Marie Waldron.

The task force will meet twice a month to develop actions government and businesses can take to help Californians recover “as fast as safely possible from the COVID-19 induced recession,” with a focus on those hardest hit by the pandemic, according to the news release from the Governor’s office.

Jointly overseeing the new task force will be business and civic leader Tom Steyer and Governor Newsom’s Chief of Staff Ann O’Leary. Steyer also was named the Governor’s chief adviser on business and jobs recovery, a position for which he will receive no compensation.

See the news release announcing the task force and the full list of task force members.
**HRWatchdog Explains Documenting, Calculating Employees’ Leaves**

To address employers’ lingering questions about the requirements of the federal law providing COVID-19-related emergency paid sick leave and emergency family and medical leave, the HRWatchdog blog recently published two articles.

- The first post tackles how to properly document Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) leave to claim tax credits.
- The second uses the most recent guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to explain how to calculate an eligible employee’s hours of leave and their average regular rate for both emergency paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for COVID-19-related reasons.

**Properly Documenting FFCRA Leave**

The FFCRA provides fully refundable tax credits to cover the cost of the required leave. According to Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidance, employers can begin taking advantage of the credits by withholding federal employment taxes equal to the amount of leave paid, rather than depositing them with the IRS. Employers will report this on their Form 941, Employer’s Quarterly Federal Tax Return.

The IRS requires certain documentation to claim the credits. First, employers will need to collect specific information when the employee gives notice of the need to take leave, including:

- Employee’s name;
- Dates for which leave is requested;
- Qualifying reason for leave; and
- Statement that the employee is unable to work or telework for that reason.

As previously mentioned in another HRWatchdog post, employees also must provide information specific to the qualifying reason for leave.


**Calculating FFCRA Leave Hours, Rates**

The DOL has also issued guidance on calculating an employee’s hours of leave and average regular rate.

**Emergency Paid Sick Leave Hours**

For employees with regular schedules, the FFCRA provides eligible full-time employees with 80 hours of emergency paid sick leave, and employees are considered full time if they’re scheduled to work at least 40 hours per week. Part-time employees with regular schedules are entitled to the number of hours equal to the hours they are normally scheduled to work over two workweeks.

Calculations get a little more complicated for employees with varying schedules and are expanded upon in the full HRWatchdog article.

**Expanded Family and Medical Leave Hours**

Under the FFCRA’s expanded family and medical leave, after the first 10 days of leave, employers must pay employees two-thirds of their average regular rate for their scheduled number of hours for each day leave is taken, subject to the statutory cap of $200 per day and $10,000 total.

If an employee has a normal work schedule, then the employee is entitled to the hours they’re normally scheduled to work on that day.

If an employee’s schedule varies, the employee is entitled to the average number of hours they were scheduled to work each workday (not calendar day) over the six-month period ending on the date the employee takes leave, including any hours in which the employee took leave of any type.

**Average Regular Rate**

For both emergency paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave, the FFCRA requires pay based on the employees’ “average regular rate.” The average regular rate is calculated over all full workweeks during the six-month period ending on the first day leave is taken. If, over the six-month period, an employee is paid through fixed hourly wage or salary, the average regular rate would equal the hourly wage or hourly equivalent of their salary.

But, if an employee is paid through different arrangements, such as piece rate, commissions or tips, the regular rate may fluctuate from week to week. In that case, for each full workweek in the six-month period, employers will calculate all remuneration not excluded from the regular rate under the Fair Labor Standards Act. Then, employers will compute the number of hours worked for each full workweek. Finally, divide the total pay over the six-month period by all hours worked. The result is the average regular rate.

To read “DOL Helps Employers Calculate FFCRA Leave Hours, Rates” in full, please visit https://hrwatchdog.calchamber.com/2020/04/dol-helps-employers-calculate-ffcra-leave-hours-rates/.

Staff Contact: James Ward

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**Reasonable Accommodations During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

_from Page 2_

EEOC reminds employers to evaluate requests for additional or altered accommodations the same way they would any other accommodation request.

Remember, the EEOC enforces only the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) enforces California’s reasonable accommodation laws.

If you have concerns about appropriate accommodations during the COVID-19 pandemic, consult with legal counsel to ensure compliance with both federal and state laws.

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Column based on questions asked by callers on the Labor Law Helpline, a service to California Chamber of Commerce preferred and executive members. For expert explanations of labor laws and Cal/OSHA regulations, not legal counsel for specific situations, call (800) 348-2262 or submit your question at www.hrcalifornia.com.
laboratory personnel by hand. But once industry takes over, it will be a different game, he comments.

“One of the things that industry does extremely well is to move into the mass production capability of industry,” he says.

Technology can now automate much of the testing process, and new machines made by Abbott and Roche can process thousands of tests at a time. Whereas weeks ago it would take days to determine if someone was positive for COVID-19, new technology can now process results in between 15 and 45 minutes. Emerging technology will potentially be able to process tests at the point of care, such as doctor’s offices, or even at home, Moscicki explains.

Zaremberg points out that, while some businesses are checking their employees’ temperatures when they come into work, that form of testing is not fail-safe.

Moscicki agrees, saying that the COVID-19 virus can be spread by respiratory droplets from infected people who do not exhibit obvious symptoms, like coughing or fever. With the advanced testing technology that is expected to become available, workers can be tested with a blood pinprick, either at home or onsite, detecting sick workers before they go in to work.

**Middle-Term Solution: Treatment**

*Time Discussed: 11:50*

The lack of effective treatment for COVID-19 is one of the aspects that makes the disease so scary, Zaremberg says. A treatment that prevents sickened people from having to use ventilators or which helps those with severe disease fight off the infection would be a game-changer, Moscicki adds.

Currently there are more than 300 clinical trials worldwide on potential treatments, with most trials using existing agents that already are on the market, Moscicki explains. In Japan, for example, a clinical trial is underway using an existing flu medication.

Although it takes time, properly testing treatments and going through clinical trials is critical, Moscicki stresses. For example, much attention has been given to antimalaria drugs such as hydroxychloroquine, but very serious side effects have been seen at the dosages needed to treat COVID-19.

Uncontrolled studies (where there is not a comparison group) on remdesivir have shown promise, and data from controlled studies on the drug should come in at the end of the month, Moscicki explains. If the drug can treat COVID-19, approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may come by summer.

Moscicki remarks that he has never seen anything like the amount of cooperation between labs, pharmaceutical companies and research organizations. Researchers and companies are not interested in patents and are actively working together. They share data from early experiments and clinical trials, and are even opening up their molecular libraries.

“It’s quite astounding,” he tells Zaremberg.

A treatment that shows promise and can be a bridge until a vaccine is developed is treatment made from the donated antibodies of people who have recovered from COVID-19, Moscicki says. The treatment has been highly effective, and it can treat those who are very sick or insulate high-risk patients, such as nursing home residents, through monthly infusions.

**Long-Term Solution: Vaccines**

*Time Discussed: 22:07*

Ultimately, however, a vaccine is needed.

“Vaccines are the real answer and the best answer,” Moscicki says, because the long-lasting protection from one injection or series of applications provides the opportunity to create “herd immunity.”

A vaccine, however, is likely a year out from coming to market due to the lengthy clinical trials that are needed to ensure that the treatment is not worse than the disease, Zaremberg says.

Vaccines are different than therapeutic drugs because they need to be given to healthy people, Moscicki explains. First, a potential vaccine needs to be created—a process that could take as long as a year, or, thanks to recent advancements, months. Once a potential vaccine enters clinical trials, scientists need to sift through data from thousands of people to determine if the vaccine works when a person is exposed to the virus, and whether those who receive the vaccine have more or fewer symptoms compared to unvaccinated people.

While vaccines may not be available in the short term, Zaremberg says, we are on the path to mitigate the risks of COVID-19.

“It will take a little bit of time, but science is how we get back to normal,” Moscicki says.
COVID-19 Prompts Extra Paid Sick Leave for Food Sector Workers

On April 16, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Executive Order N-51-20, creating a COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave that requires employers, who are covered by Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Orders 3, 8, 13 and 14, Health and Safety Code section 113789 and have 500 or more employees, to provide up to two weeks (80 hours) of supplemental paid sick leave to food sector workers unable to work due to COVID-19.

Updated 4/20/2020: The California Department of Industrial Relations has published frequently asked questions on Supplemental Paid Sick Leave for Food Sector Workers.

Who’s Covered

The COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave is limited in scope and applies only to food sector workers (such as farmworkers, agricultural workers and those working in grocery stores and fast food chains), and delivery network companies/drivers.

Workers covered under the order are entitled to take supplemental sick leave if they’re unable to work because they are:

1. Subject to a federal, state or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;
2. Advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine or self-isolate due to concerns related to COVID-19; or
3. Prohibited from working by the “Food Sector Worker’s Hiring Entity” due to health concerns related to the potential transmission of COVID-19.

Amount of Sick Leave Time

The total amount of supplemental sick leave time a qualified employee may take depends upon the number of hours that individual normally works.

A worker considered “full-time”—or who worked or was scheduled to work on average at least 40 hours per week in the two weeks preceding the date supplemental leave was taken—is entitled to the maximum of 80 hours of COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave.

Food sector employees not considered full-time or who work less than 40 hours per week are entitled to leave equal to the total hours they’re normally scheduled to work over two weeks. The order also provides for a method of calculating leave for a food sector worker on a variable-hour work schedule.

The leave must be made available upon the qualified food sector worker’s oral or written request and be paid out at a rate equal to the highest of either the:

• Worker’s regular rate of pay for the last pay period;
• State minimum wage; or
• Local minimum wage.

Pay may not exceed $511 per day and $5,110 in total.

The COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave is in addition to paid sick leave already required under California’s Healthy Families Healthy Workplace sick leave law, and it will be enforced in the same manner.

New Notice, Hand-Washing Standard

The order also includes a new notice requirement: The Labor Commissioner shall make publicly available a model notice by April 23, 2020, and this notice must be posted in a conspicuous location. However, if the employer has food sector workers who don’t frequent the workplace, the notice may be distributed by electronic means, such as via email.

Finally, the order also establishes a hand-washing standard; employees working in any food facility can wash their hands every 30 minutes and more, as needed. This standard is enforced under provisions of the Retail Food Code.

At the federal level, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) went into effect on April 2, 2020, granting emergency paid sick leave benefits to employees unable to work due to COVID-19-qualifying events. Because the FFCRA was limited to employees who work for an employer with fewer than 500 employees, California’s COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave is intended to fill the gap by providing food sector employees working for such employers with additional COVID-19-related sick leave benefits.

CalChamber COVID-19 Resources

Visit the CalChamber Coronavirus (COVID-19) webpage for more COVID-19-related federal, state and local resources, including CalChamber coverage.

Access additional COVID-19-related posts on the HRWatchdog blog.

Staff Contact: Erika Frank

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LIVE WEBINAR | THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2020 | 10:00 - 11:30 AM PT
Remote Control: Rules for Remote and Traveling Employees

Even before COVID-19 turned workplaces upside down, there has been a major upswing toward employees working from home.

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