

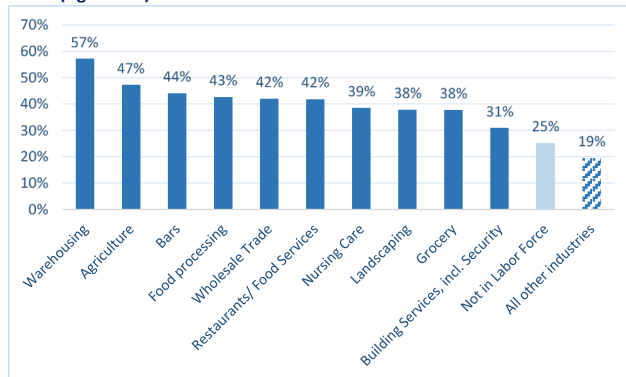
**APRIL 2021**

**FACT SHEET: The Pandemic’s Toll on California Workers in High Risk Industries**

**Workers in ten California industries experienced an over 30% increase in deaths during the first ten months of the pandemic.**

A UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of state public health data finds that, during the first ten months of the pandemic, deaths among Californians aged 18-65 increased by 25%.<sup>i</sup> Workers accounted for 87% of those additional deaths—12,500 of 14,370. Ten California industries experienced an over 30% increase in deaths.

**Figure 1. California’s Top 10 Job Sectors with Highest Pandemic-era Increases in Death (Age 18-65)**



Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of California Department of Public Health- California Comprehensive Death File, March-December, 2019-2020

**Table 1. California’s Top 10 Job Sectors with Highest Pandemic-era Increases in Death (Age 18-65)**

	Increase in Deaths (Pct)	2019	2020	Increase in Deaths (number)
Warehousing	57%	584	918	334
Agriculture	47%	1,195	1,760	565
Bars	44%	93	134	41
Food processing	43%	509	726	217
Wholesale Trade	42%	616	875	259
Restaurants/ Food Services	42%	2,538	3,598	1,060
Nursing Care	39%	296	410	114
Landscaping	38%	787	1,085	298
Grocery	38%	978	1,347	369
Building Services, incl. Security	31%	1,361	1,783	422
Not in Labor Force	25%	7,401	9,271	1,870
All other industries	19%	34,124	40,758	6,634
California total	25%	58,184	72,554	14,370

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of California Department of Public Health- California Comprehensive Death File, March-December, 2019-2020

**Warehouse workers** had the highest statewide increase in pandemic-related deaths (57%).<sup>2</sup> Between March and December 2020, 334 more warehouse workers died than in 2019.

**Food-chain Workers Were Most Affected.** Workers in food-supply chain industries comprised four of the ten California industries with the highest increase in deaths.

**Agricultural workers** (47%) ranked second, with 565 more deaths than in the same period in 2019.

**Food processing workers** (43%) experienced 217 excess deaths. Restaurant and food services workers (42%) experienced 1,060 excess deaths.

Workers in stores that carried groceries (including superstores, convenience stores, and liquor stores) experienced 369 more deaths (38%) compared with the year before.

California’s ten industries with highest increases in death also included nursing care (39%), landscaping (38%), and building services (including janitorial and security) (31%).

Californians aged 18-65 not in the labor force experienced a 25% increase of deaths during the same period. Those working in all other industries experienced a 19% increase in death.

**High Risk Industries.** The State of California has identified six key job sectors at high risk of COVID-19 spread: agriculture, food processing (including meatpacking), grocery or retail, restaurants/food services, janitorial/hospitality, manufacturing and warehouse/logistics. Nearly all of these “high risk” industries appeared in the list of top ten California industries with the highest pandemic-era increases in deaths.

**A Higher Rate of Immigrant, Noncitizen Workers.** Many industries in the top ten of the highest pandemic-related deaths have traditionally had high rates of migrant workers—from food-chain industries, to building services (e.g. janitorial work) and landscaping, to nursing care facilities.

A prior analysis of worker demographics and characteristics had found striking differences between each of California’s “high risk” job sectors and workers in non high-risk sectors.<sup>3</sup>

California’s high risk workers, compared with those in non-high risk sectors, were far more likely to be immigrant (47% vs 31%), particularly non-citizen (28% vs 13%) (analysis not shown).

**Much Larger Households.** High risk workers lived in households that were on average larger (3.7 persons versus 2.8), were more likely to have children (48% vs 39%), and were twice as likely to have multiple families living under the same roof (17 multiple families per 100 households, versus 8 per 100 for non-high risk) (Macias et al. 2021). Disadvantages were apparent across every one of the six high risk job sectors.

**Lower Wages.** California’s high risk workers also earned lower wages, as a whole. While non-high risk workers earned a median salary of \$39,008, only manufacturing workers earned more (\$51,183), and only food processing workers earned above \$30,000 (\$30,324). Workers in all

high risk job sectors earned far less, had lower home ownership rates, and experienced much higher rates of poverty.

**A Need for Worker & Public Education and Stronger Enforcement of Workplace Laws.** The disparities between high-risk and non-high risk workers, and the increased rate of pandemic-related death among high risk workers, indicates a vulnerable workforce and suggests the need for more worker and public health and education, and enforcement of worker rights.

Public education and outreach to low-wage, immigrant, non-citizen workers should emphasize their rights as workers, workplace health and safety hazards and protections, to ensure safer workplaces. Partnerships with worker-centered organizations that can provide ongoing health and safety information and training is critical.

Additionally, public agencies regulating workplace health and safety should be adequately funded and staffed to ensure robust enforcement of workplace health and safety standards across all industries, particularly those continuing to pose a high risk of COVID-19 spread. Agency staffing should also reflect the many languages spoken by workers in California’s high risk industries.

## References

Chen, Yea-Hung, Maria Glymour, Alicia Riley, John Balmes, Kate Duchowny, Robert Harrison, Ellicot Matthay, Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo. 2021. Excess Mortality Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic among Californians 18-65 years of age, by occupational sector and occupation: March through October 2020. medRxiv [PrePrint]. January 22, 2021 [cited April 26, 2021]. Available from: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.01.21.21250266v1>

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Karina Juarez, Sara Patino, Yulissa Penalzoa, Chelsea Ramirez, Emanuel Gutierrez, and Jorge Rodriguez-Mota for their contribution to this project.

## Mission Statement

The UC Merced Community and Labor Center conducts research and education on issues of community, labor and employment, in the San Joaquin Valley and beyond.

pandemic-related deaths among warehouse workers a separate from transportation workers.

<sup>3</sup> See Macias et al. (2021) for the statewide analysis of high risk versus non-high risk workers, drawing upon ACS data from 2014-2018.

<sup>1</sup> This analysis focused on the period between March-December 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.

<sup>2</sup> An earlier study on California pandemic-related mortality found transportation/logistics workers to have the second-highest *occupational* risk ratio (Chen et al. 2021). In this analysis, we analyze *industry*-level,