

Welcome...

This edition of the Rehab Review features information on the new WorkCover lodgement processes and an article on Injury Management for fractures.

Our frequently asked questions addresses the issue of having a 2nd Injury whilst on WorkCover and ADO accrual whilst on WorkCover for school based positions.

We have included articles on Adjustment Disorders and on payments over school vacations for employees who are participating in a rehabilitation program.

If you have any feedback on the Rehab Review newsletter or would like to contribute an article, please contact Nicola on 323 70789 or by email at nicola.barnes@deta.qld.gov.au

New WorkCover Lodgement Processes

Previously the lodgement of a WorkCover claim involved the provision of documentation from the employee and the school being sent to Regional Office, who would then forward this to WorkCover.

In an effort to speed up the claim determination process, WorkCover Queensland now allows an employee to lodge a claim directly with WorkCover in a variety of ways:

- Application form faxed from the treating Doctor;
- Application lodged over the phone;
- Application lodged by post; and
- Application completed on-line via WorkCover's internet site.

In addition WorkCover have advised they no longer require a formal Employer's Report for every claim. However, they do need advice from the employer about whether they have any concerns about the claim before it can be accepted.

These changes can result in quicker processing. However, it is very important that any communication regarding a claim be actioned as promptly as possible by all parties to ensure there is certainty of pay and early assistance with rehabilitation.

Please note that individual regions may have introduced their own procedures to meet the above requirements. Please contact your local Senior Rehabilitation Consultant or Claims Officer for further information.

EMPLOYEE In ALL instances, the employee should advise their supervisor as soon as possible after injuring themselves, or visiting their Doctor, that they are lodging a claim for workers' compensation. Ideally this should be the same day. A copy of the application form and medical certificate should be given to their supervisor. Their supervisor will advise them of any additional information or forms they may need to complete.

WORKPLACE As soon as the workplace is made aware of the claim they should confirm that the event occurred in the manner reported. The workplace will need to advise the region whether they have any concerns regarding the reported circumstances of the injury. Workplaces should never advise WorkCover to pay a claim, this is the responsibility of the Region.

WORKCOVER If WorkCover have received the application directly from the employee, they will forward a copy of the application form to the Regional Office. Regional Office will then contact the school to establish if they support the acceptance of the claim.

REGIONAL OFFICE Regional Office will process the claim as quickly as possible if they have all the necessary information. However, they need the assistance of the injured employee and the school to be able to process the claim in a timely fashion. Regional Office will contact the school to establish if they support the acceptance of the claim and advise WorkCover of the outcome.

Injury Management - Fractures

A fracture is a break in a bone and is caused when a force is applied to the bone in an amount greater than it can support. This may be a direct force as in a blow, a twisting force or repeated pounding on the same bone.

The risk of a fracture is increased with:

- increased age because bones become more brittle and susceptible to breaking
- when individuals are exposed to falls, objects falling on them, twisting extremities, or crushing injuries
- involvement in high risk activities including those with high velocity or high impact.

Treatment If the fracture in the bone is a clean break protective rest may be all that is needed to allow healing to occur. If the break is in an inadequate position for this type of healing, immobilisation of the break may be required. Immobilisation may range from an employee using a sling, a brace or a cast. Ice, elevation and medication may also be used to decrease swelling and pain.

Simple, non-complicated fractures will usually heal in approximately 6 to 12 weeks without loss of function. Any increase in severity of the fracture or added complications will delay recovery for weeks, to months and may compromise function.

Possible Work Restrictions/Accommodations for Graduated Return to Work

Upon returning to work, employees will require some kind of immobilising device which could present safety hazards to themselves or co-workers, ie. crutches can only be used on dry, hard surfaces and will decrease manual dexterity.

In the early weeks, employees may require frequent rest periods written into their graduated return to work plan and an area or place to allow the injured extremity to be elevated.

Employees may be required to attend physical and/or occupational therapy appointments to facilitate optimum results and some time off work may be needed for these visits. A worksite assessment by an occupational therapist may be beneficial to ensure safety issues and work feasibility in some more severe situations.

If an employee fails to recover within the maximum duration expectancy period, there may be underlying conditions (ie. diabetes, vascular disease, osteoporosis) or an associated injury (tendon laceration, compartment syndrome) that may be impacting on recovery. Rehab Co-ordinators should maintain contact with the treating medical officers throughout the employee's recovery and contact their Senior Rehabilitation Consultant for advice in complex situations.

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens if someone has a 2nd Injury while accessing WorkCover?

The most important thing to do is to contact WorkCover immediately to advise them of the injury. WorkCover will then provide you with advice on the appropriate action to be taken next.

If the injury is related to their work or rehabilitation, this may involve the employee lodging a 2nd claim with WorkCover.

WorkCover will then undertake an assessment to determine the impact this secondary injury will have on the payments made on the employees current WorkCover claim.

Adjustment Disorder

Employee absence from work is often caused by emotional and psychological stress, related to significant life events, which may be work or non-work related.

An adjustment disorder is a debilitating reaction, to a stressful event or situation. The development of emotional and/or behavioural symptoms usually occurs within 3 months of exposure to the stressor(s) and typically resolves within 6 months. Where a stressor is ongoing, symptoms are likely to persist in the absence of treatment and the condition may become chronic. (Bereavement reactions are excluded from the diagnosis of Adjustment Disorder.)

An adjustment disorder may manifest primarily as: depressed mood, anxiety, mixed anxiety and depressed mood, disturbance of conduct or as a mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct. For a diagnosis of Adjustment Disorder to be made, the symptoms must be clinically significant, as evidenced by either:

- distress that is in excess of what would be expected from exposure to the stressor(s); or
- significant impairment in social, occupational or educational functioning.

If someone is already suffering from a physical or psychological illness, that condition may worsen during the period of the adjustment disorder. People experiencing an adjustment disorder often do poorly at work and have difficulties in their personal relationships.

Useful Resources

MediLexicon is a website that has the world's largest online database of pharmaceutical and medical abbreviations over 230,000 and growing <http://www.medilexicon.com>

Medline Plus is an American website. It will help direct you to information to help answer health questions. MedlinePlus also has extensive information about drugs, an illustrated medical encyclopaedia, interactive patient tutorials, and the latest health news. <http://medlineplus.gov>

ADO accrual whilst on WorkCover

School based employees, such as cleaners and teacher aides, generally work extra hours each term to accrue ADO time to cover school vacation periods. If they are injured at work, they may not be able to accrue sufficient ADO time to ensure they are fully paid for a vacation period.

If an employees has an accepted WorkCover claim and has been unable to accrue sufficient ADO time to cover a school vacation as a result of this injury, the Department will pay the employee for the full vacation period. There will be no requirement for the employee to work any extra hours to repay this ADO time once they have recovered.

WorkCover Payments Over School Vacations

Total Incapacity

If an employee has a medical certificate that spans a school holiday period indicating that they are totally unable to work as a result of their injury, WorkCover will pay the employee compensation for the entire period.

If an employee would normally use their accrued recreation leave during this holiday period (e.g. cleaners or teachers aides would normally use their recreation leave during the Christmas holidays) then the employee will need to negotiate with their workplace an alternative time to use this leave, once they have recovered from their injury.

Graduated Return to Works

If an employee has a medical certificate that spans a school holiday period indicating that they are able to participate in a graduated return to work, the following will occur:

1. The Department will provide WorkCover with the details of the hours that the employee would have been working on a graduated return to work plan, had there been no school holidays.
2. The Department will pay the employee for any hours the employee would have worked, had the employee been on a graduated return to work plan during the holidays, in accordance with usual leave arrangements.
3. WorkCover will pay the employee for any hours that the employee would not have worked, had the employee been on a graduated return to work plan during the holidays.

If an employee is medically cleared to fully return to work during a vacation period, WorkCover will pay the employee's wages until the date of the medical clearance. The Department will then commence paying the employee following the date of the clearance, in accordance with usual leave arrangements.

