

COMPENDIUM OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION STATISTICS AUSTRALIA 2005–06

June 2008



Australian Government
Australian Safety and Compensation Council

Disclaimer

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC) provides the information given in this document to improve public access to information about occupational health and safety. The vision of the ASCC is Australian workplaces free from injury and disease. Its mission is to lead and coordinate national efforts to prevent workplace death, injury and disease in Australia.

The information provided in this document can only assist you in the most general way. This document does not replace any statutory requirements under any relevant State and Territory legislation. The ASCC accepts no liability arising from the use of or reliance on the material contained on this document, which is provided on the basis that the ASCC is not thereby engaged in rendering professional advice. Before relying on the material, users should carefully make their own assessment as to its accuracy, currency, completeness and relevance for their purposes, and should obtain any appropriate professional advice relevant to their particular circumstances. To the extent that the material in this document includes views or recommendations of third parties, such views or recommendations do not necessarily reflect the views of the ASCC or the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations nor do they indicate a commitment to a particular course of action.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2008

ISBN 978-0-642-32821-2

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>

Part E

Feature article

Time away from work

This feature article further explores the factors that influence the time employees were away from work because of work-related injury or disease. Several tables and figures in the *Trends over time* and *Industry profile* sections of the Compendium show differences over time in the median time lost by employees. The analysis in this article takes a different approach. Serious non-fatal claims are split into five groups (referred to as duration groups) based on the time the employee was away from work. Notable differences across and between these groups are discussed.

This article is based on 2003–04 data since analysis of time lost from work is best based on a year in which the large majority of claims are closed.

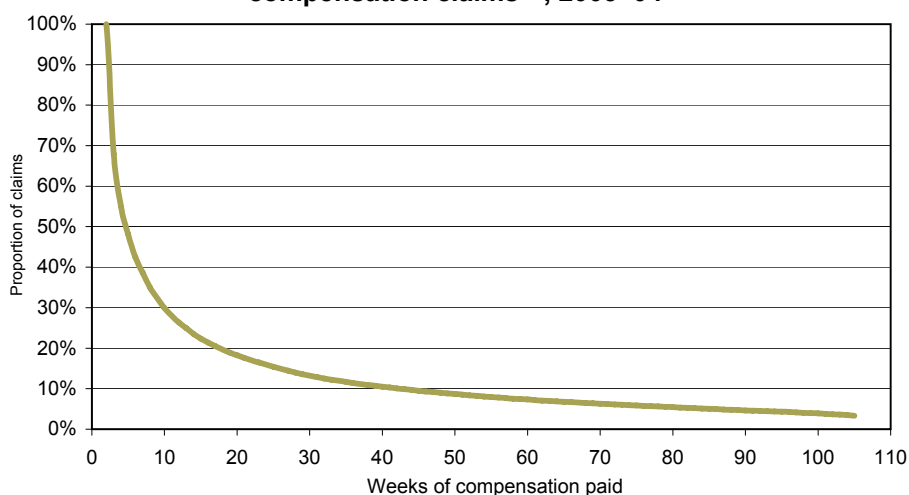
Time away from work is calculated in working weeks: one working week is lost when the number of hours an employee was absent from work was equal to or greater than the number of hours they usually worked per week prior to the injury or onset of disease (for more detail see Appendix 1: Explanatory note 2, p.76).

Besides the severity of their injury or disease, the period an employee was away from work would have been influenced by their personal characteristics, such as mental and physical health, and how their injury or disease was managed by their employer and health care professionals. However, the NDS database does not include such information and cannot examine these factors.

Distribution of length of serious non-fatal claims

Figure 33 shows the proportion of serious non-fatal workers' compensation claims lodged in 2003–04 that were still current after a particular number of working weeks (up to 104). Since the publication scope used in the Compendium excludes claims lasting less than one working week (with the exception of claims involving permanent incapacity), by definition, 100% of serious non-fatal claims involved

Figure 33 Distribution of length of serious non-fatal workers' compensation claims^(a), 2003–04



(a) Includes claims for permanent incapacity that may involve little or no time away from work.

one or more weeks away from work. The initial steep drop in the curve clearly demonstrates the relatively short-term nature of the majority of serious non-fatal claims: just over half (52%) of the employees were away from work for less than 4 weeks.

Three-quarters were away for less than 12 weeks. The remaining one-quarter of claims, represented by the flattening section of the curve, involved absences from work for more extended periods: 8% involved one year or more absence from work and 3% two years or more absence.

Since the compensation costs of a claim are directly related to length of time the employee is absent from work, these longer-term claims can be costly. However, these longer term claims may also be more costly in non-monetary ways due to factors such as social isolation and personal confidence.

Nature of injury or disease

The main determinant of how long an employee will be absent from work is most probably the type of injury or disease they sustained. Although other factors will impinge on this relationship — some examinable, such as age or gender, some not, such as fitness and mental attitude — severe injuries or diseases are likely to require longer recovery times than minor injuries or diseases.

Table 26 shows the distribution patterns of the most common nature of injury or disease claims between and across the duration groups for 2003–04. The proportion of serious non-fatal claims involving injury or poisoning was relatively higher in the shorter duration groups and lower among longer duration groups: with a concomitant increase in proportion of claims related to disease. Among employees who were absent from work for less than 6 weeks (referred to as short-term claims), just over three-quarters (78%) had sustained an injury or poisoning. Among employees who were absent for 52 weeks or more (referred to as very long-term claims), injury or poisoning claims accounted for 64% of claims. Overall, 64% of all injury and poisoning claims were short-term and 7% were very long-term. By comparison, 54% of disease-related claims were short-term and 12% were very long-term.

There are notable differences in the distribution of claims across and between duration groups for some types of injury and disease. Among injury categories for example, claims involving *Burns* were predominately short-term (86%), with just 2% extending to 52 weeks or more. Similarly, just over three-quarters of claims (78%) involving the category *Open wound not involving traumatic amputation* were short-term with 2% very long-term. The distribution of claims within the duration groups for this nature category varied between 10% of all short-term claims (less than 6 weeks) to 2% of very long-term claims (52 weeks or more).

Mental disorders was the most common type of disease related claim in 2003–04 (6% of all claims). Claims for *Mental disorders* tend to involve extended periods of absence from work: 16% of such claims resulted in the employee being absent from work for 52 weeks or more. Within the 52 weeks or more duration group, 12% of claims were for *Mental disorders*, making them the second most common type of injury or disease after *Sprains and strains of joints and adjacent muscles* (45% of claims in the 52 weeks or more duration group).

Claims relating to *Deafness* (generally a permanent incapacity) are notable for the small proportion that involve time away from work, however, the majority are assigned into the less than 6 weeks duration group as part of the data scoping process.

Table 26 Serious non-fatal claims: percentage of claims by duration group by nature of injury^(a), 2003–04

Nature of injury	Less than	6 to 11	12 to 25	26 to 51	52 weeks	All claims
	6 weeks ^(b)	weeks	weeks	weeks	or more	
Percentage of duration group						
Injury & poisoning	78.0	73.1	70.8	69.7	63.5	74.9
<i>Sprains & strains of joints & adjacent muscles</i>	47.5	42.3	46.3	49.0	44.8	46.5
<i>Open wound not involving traumatic amputation</i>	9.9	6.8	4.2	2.8	1.9	7.8
<i>Fractures</i>	5.8	13.6	11.0	9.0	7.4	7.8
<i>Contusion with intact skin surface & crushing injury excluding those with fracture</i>	7.8	5.0	4.5	4.3	4.4	6.6
<i>Burns</i>	1.9	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.3	1.3
<i>Dislocation</i>	0.5	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.6	0.7
<i>Superficial injury</i>	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.7
<i>Multiple injuries</i>	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.9	0.5
<i>Foreign body on external eye, in ear or nose or in respiratory, digestive or reproductive systems</i>	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.5
<i>Traumatic amputation including enucleation of eye (loss of eyeball)</i>	0.3	0.8	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4
Diseases	22.0	26.9	29.2	30.3	36.5	25.1
<i>Mental disorders</i>	3.9	7.5	9.7	11.5	12.2	6.2
<i>Disorders of muscle, tendons & other soft tissues</i>	4.9	5.8	7.3	8.3	9.3	5.8
<i>Dorsopathies - disorders of the spinal vertebrae & intervertebral discs</i>	3.7	4.4	5.6	6.3	10.9	4.8
<i>Deafness^(b)</i>	4.1	0	0	0	0.1	2.5
<i>Hernia</i>	2.0	5.6	2.5	0.7	0.5	2.3
<i>Disorders of nerve roots, plexuses & single nerves</i>	0.6	1.5	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.0
<i>Arthropathies & related disorders - disorders of the joints</i>	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.4
Total non-fatal claims	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number of non-fatal claims	90 450	20 130	15 415	9 155	12 155	147 305
Percentage of total claims in nature category						
Injury & poisoning	64.0	13.3	9.9	5.8	7.0	100.0
<i>Sprains & strains of joints & adjacent muscles</i>	62.6	12.4	10.4	6.5	8.0	100.0
<i>Open wound not involving traumatic amputation</i>	78.2	11.9	5.7	2.2	2.0	100.0
<i>Fractures</i>	46.2	23.9	14.8	7.2	7.9	100.0
<i>Contusion with intact skin surface & crushing injury excluding those with fracture</i>	72.8	10.4	7.2	4.1	5.5	100.0
<i>Burns</i>	86.4	7.3	3.0	1.5	2.0	100.0
<i>Dislocation</i>	50.0	18.7	15.7	8.6	7.6	100.0
<i>Superficial injury</i>	82.7	7.7	4.1	3.1	2.6	100.0
<i>Multiple injuries</i>	52.1	12.0	11.3	9.2	15.5	100.0
<i>Foreign body on external eye, in ear or nose or in respiratory, digestive or reproductive systems</i>	90.0	4.3	2.9	1.4	1.4	100.0
<i>Traumatic amputation including enucleation of eye (loss of eyeball)</i>	45.2	27.0	12.7	5.6	8.7	100.0
Diseases	53.7	14.6	12.2	7.5	12.0	100.0
<i>Mental disorders</i>	38.9	16.6	16.5	11.6	16.3	100.0
<i>Disorders of muscle, tendons & other soft tissues</i>	51.4	13.6	13.1	8.8	13.1	100.0
<i>Dorsopathies - disorders of the spinal vertebrae & intervertebral discs</i>	48.1	12.5	12.4	8.2	18.8	100.0
<i>Deafness^(b)</i>	99.6	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3	100.0
<i>Hernia</i>	52.6	32.8	11.0	1.7	1.6	100.0
<i>Disorders of nerve roots, plexuses & single nerves</i>	37.5	20.7	19.7	9.7	12.0	100.0
<i>Arthropathies & related disorders - disorders of the joints</i>	45.9	16.4	15.6	9.0	13.1	100.0
Total non-fatal claims	61.4	13.7	10.5	6.2	8.3	100.0

(a) Detailed injury and disease categories (those in italics) are limited to those with more than 500 claims overall. Ranking is based on claim numbers (see Table 11a, p. 31 for claim numbers).

(b) Standard publication scope is limited to claims involving one week or more absence from work. However, claims for permanent incapacity that may involve little or no time away from work are included in this group (Deafness claims in particular fall into this category).

Age of employee

Table 27 Serious non-fatal claims: age of employee by duration group, 2003–04

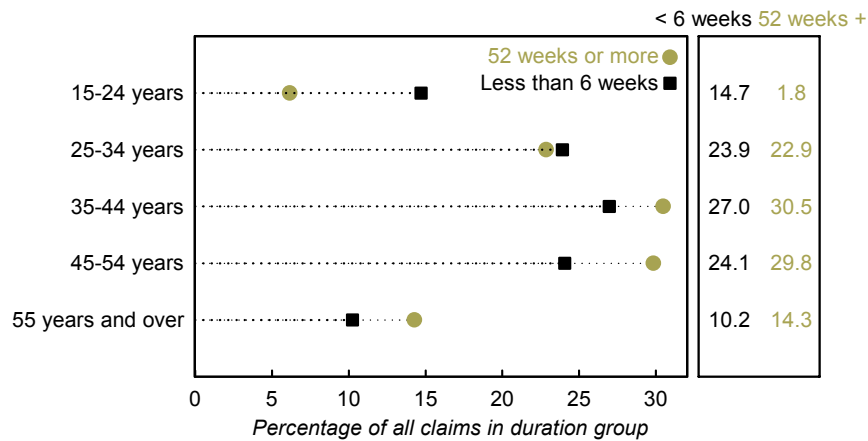
Age group	Less than 6 weeks	6 to 11 weeks	12 to 25 weeks	26 to 51 weeks	52 weeks or more	All claims
Percentage of duration group						
15-19 years	5.7	4.2	3.3	2.4	1.5	4.7
20-24 years	10.9	9.3	7.9	6.3	4.7	9.6
25-29 years	10.7	10.2	8.9	8.9	7.2	10.0
30-34 years	12.0	11.9	11.6	11.5	11.3	11.8
35-39 years	11.7	12.3	12.7	13.1	13.9	12.1
40-44 years	13.1	13.4	14.6	15.4	15.7	13.7
45-49 years	12.5	13.4	14.1	14.6	16.4	13.3
50-54 years	10.9	12.2	13.0	12.8	14.7	11.8
55-59 years	7.9	8.5	8.8	9.3	10.2	8.3
60-64 years	3.5	3.6	4.0	4.2	4.0	3.7
65 years & over	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.5	0.4	0.9
Total non-fatal claims	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number of non-fatal claims	90 450	20 130	15 415	9 155	12 155	147 305
Percentage of total claims in age group						
15-19 years	74.5	12.2	7.5	3.2	2.6	100.0
20-24 years	70.0	13.3	8.6	4.1	4.1	100.0
25-29 years	65.3	13.9	9.3	5.5	6.0	100.0
30-34 years	62.0	13.8	10.3	6.1	7.9	100.0
35-39 years	59.1	13.8	10.9	6.7	9.5	100.0
40-44 years	59.0	13.4	11.2	7.0	9.5	100.0
45-49 years	58.0	13.8	11.1	6.8	10.2	100.0
50-54 years	57.1	14.2	11.6	6.8	10.3	100.0
55-59 years	58.0	13.9	11.1	6.9	10.1	100.0
60-64 years	59.2	13.3	11.4	7.1	9.0	100.0
65 years & over	61.7	14.0	10.8	9.7	3.8	100.0
Total non-fatal claims	61.4	13.7	10.5	6.2	8.3	100.0

Table 27 examines the age distribution of employees in each duration group in 2003–04 and shows that, with increasing duration, the age structure of each group became progressively older. The proportion of employees aged 50 years or over within the duration groups increased from 23% of short-term claims up to 29% of very long-term claims.

The distribution of claims for each age group across the duration groups shows an alternative way of examining the change in age structure within the duration groups. In general, among younger employees most claims were concentrated in the shorter duration groups, whereas among older employees, a greater proportion of claims extend into the longer duration groups. For example, among claims made by employees aged 20-24 years, 70% were short-term and 4% were very long-term. Conversely, among claims made by employees aged 55-54 years, 57% were short-term and 10% very-long term. The impact of limited eligibility for workers' compensation among employees in the 65 years and over age group (see Appendix 1: Explanatory note 3, p.77) is reflected in the relatively small proportion (4%) of employees of that age within the 52 weeks or more duration group.

Some of this observed pattern may be related to differences in the type of injury or disease sustained at differing ages, or may be due to other factors such as changes with age in the rate at which an injury heals. Figure 34 examines the age structure of employees who had claims for *Sprains and strains of joints and adjacent muscles* (the most common type of injury or disease) that fell in the shortest and longest duration groups. Although this reduces any effect of differing injury types with age, the distributions still show that the age distribution of employees within the very long-term claims duration group was skewed towards the older age groups.

Figure 34 Serious non-fatal claims for strains and sprains: age distribution by duration group, 2003–04



Gender of employee

Overall in 2003–04, 67% of serious non-fatal workers’ compensation claims were for male employees and 33% were for female employees. Figure 35 shows how this ratio differed between the duration groups. Within the short-term duration group 70% of claims were for male employees and 30% were for female employees. The proportion of female employees increased in each duration group up to the ratio of 60% male and 40% female employees within the 26 to 51 weeks or more duration group. The changes underlying this shift are predominately related to the increase in the proportion of claims for women relative to men across the duration groups for *Mental disorders* and *Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue*.

Along with the overall shift to older age distributions in the longer duration groups (shown in Table 27), the age/sex distribution of employees also changes across the duration groups. Figure 36 shows the age/sex distributions for both employees with short-term claims and very long-term claims. The proportion of claims within the duration group involving middle-aged female employees (in their late 30s to early 50s) increases notably between the less than 6 weeks and the 52 weeks and over duration groups.

Figure 35 Serious non-fatal claims: gender ratio by duration group, 2003–04

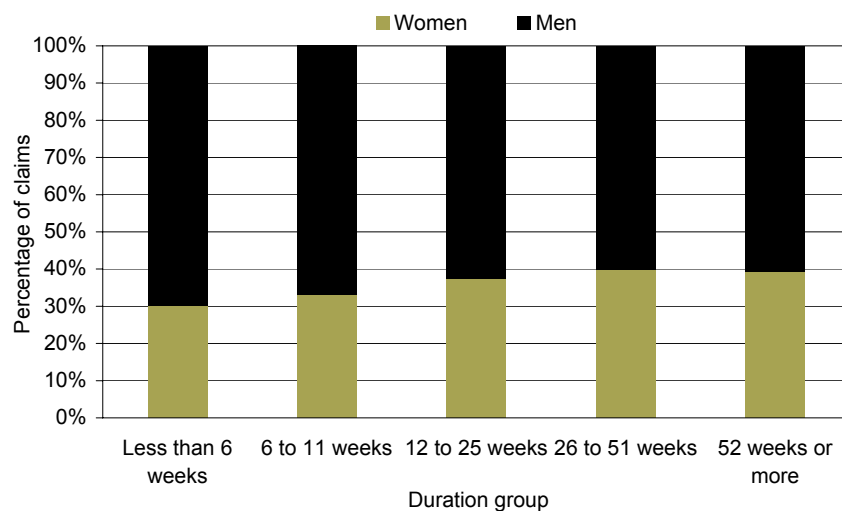
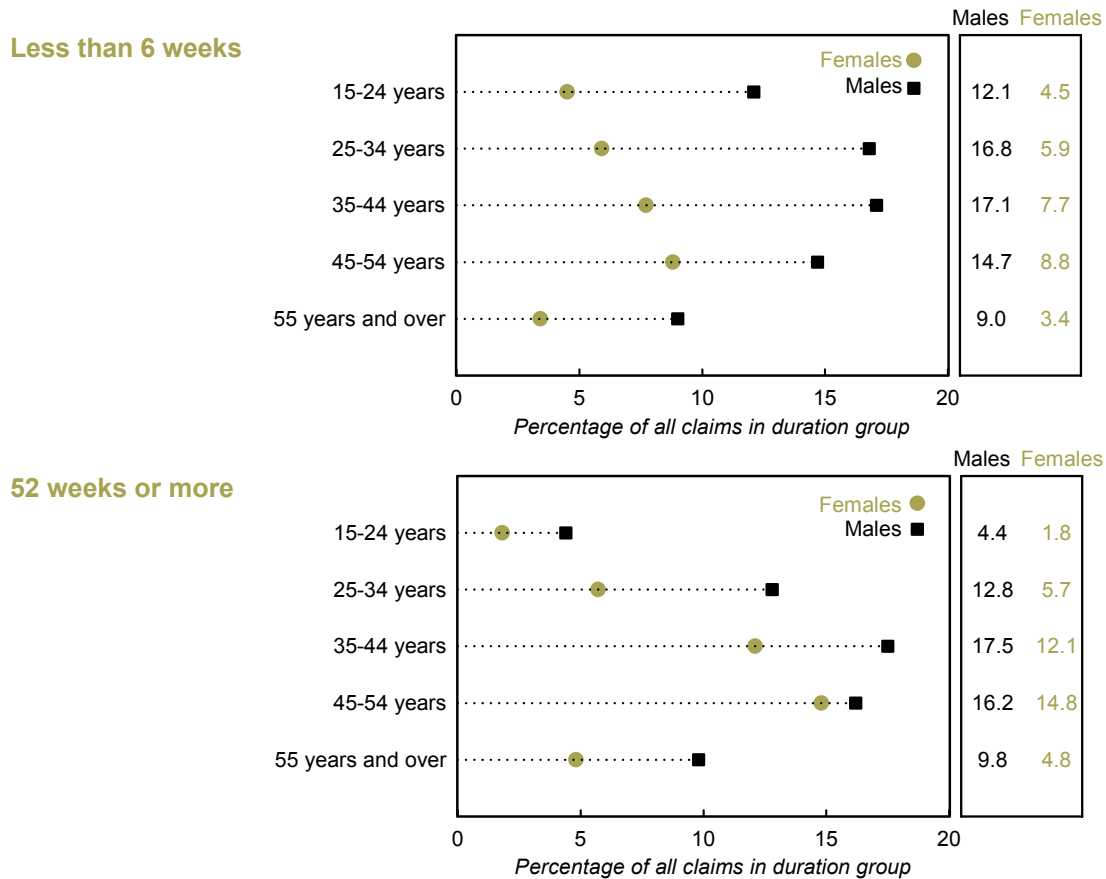


Figure 36 Serious non-fatal claims: age and sex distribution by duration group, 2003–04



Location of injury

Table 28 examines how the distribution groups differ by the location on the body for claims involving *Sprains and strains of joints and adjacent muscles* (the most common type of injury or disease). The most common location of a sprain or strain is the *Back*, accounting for 39% of non-fatal serious claims for sprains or strains. Within the duration groups the proportion of claims involving sprains and strains of the *Back* was similar: ranging between 42% of short-term claims and 34% of claims of 6 to 11 weeks duration. Across the duration groups, two-thirds of claims (66%) for *Back* related sprains and strains involved less than 6 weeks away from work: 8% involved more than 52 weeks.

The next most common location, the *Shoulder*, was slightly over-represented among very long-term claims: 17% of very long-term claims compared with 13% of all strains and sprains. The proportion of sprains and strains involving the *Shoulder* in the very long-term duration group was 11%, again higher than the 8% of all sprains and strains in the very long-term duration group.

Table 28 Serious non-fatal claims for strains and sprains: location of injury^(a) by duration group, 2003–04

Location of injury	Less than 6 weeks	6 to 11 weeks	12 to 25 weeks	26 to 51 weeks	52 weeks or more	All claims
Percentage of duration group						
Back	41.5	33.6	34.5	36.7	41.1	39.4
Shoulder	10.4	13.4	17.5	20.0	16.8	12.7
Knee	10.1	15.7	15.0	11.9	8.9	11.3
Ankle	7.9	5.4	3.6	3.6	2.3	6.4
Wrist	4.1	4.7	5.0	5.0	3.8	4.3
Neck	3.8	3.3	3.4	2.9	3.7	3.6
Hands	2.6	3.2	2.5	2.0	1.7	2.6
Elbow	1.8	2.3	2.2	2.0	1.9	1.9
Neck and shoulder	1.5	1.5	1.7	1.9	2.3	1.6
Trunk and limbs	1.5	1.3	1.6	1.6	3.2	1.6
Abdomen	1.5	2.4	1.2	0.6	0.5	1.4
Lower leg	1.6	1.4	0.9	0.6	0.6	1.4
Foot	1.5	1.0	0.9	0.6	0.6	1.2
Neck and trunk	1.1	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.9	1.2
Upper limb - multiple locations	1.0	1.5	1.3	1.6	1.5	1.2
Upper arm	0.9	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.1
Forearm	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Chest	1.3	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.9
Upper leg	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.7
Hip	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.9	0.7
Total non-fatal claims for strains & sprains	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number of non-fatal claims for strains & sprains	42 920	8 520	7 140	4 485	5 450	68 515
Percentage of total claims for location category						
Back	65.9	10.6	9.1	6.1	8.3	100.0
Shoulder	51.5	13.1	14.4	10.4	10.6	100.0
Knee	55.8	17.3	13.8	6.9	6.3	100.0
Ankle	77.3	10.3	5.9	3.7	2.8	100.0
Wrist	59.5	13.6	12.2	7.7	7.1	100.0
Neck	65.7	11.2	9.7	5.2	8.2	100.0
Hands	63.8	15.6	10.3	5.1	5.3	100.0
Elbow	58.9	14.7	12.0	6.6	7.8	100.0
Neck and shoulder	59.0	11.4	10.6	7.8	11.2	100.0
Trunk and limbs	57.6	10.0	10.5	6.3	15.6	100.0
Abdomen	64.9	20.8	8.9	2.7	2.8	100.0
Lower leg	74.5	12.8	6.6	2.9	3.2	100.0
Foot	75.2	9.9	7.8	3.0	4.2	100.0
Neck and trunk	59.4	13.2	8.9	5.7	12.8	100.0
Upper limb - multiple locations	53.7	15.4	11.6	8.9	10.3	100.0
Upper arm	51.9	14.9	13.8	9.1	10.2	100.0
Forearm	61.2	12.8	11.0	6.9	8.1	100.0
Chest	85.2	7.9	3.7	1.2	2.0	100.0
Upper leg	74.7	11.6	7.4	2.6	3.6	100.0
Hip	62.4	11.8	10.5	4.0	11.4	100.0
Total non-fatal claims for strains & sprains	62.6	12.4	10.4	6.5	8.0	100.0

(a) Location of injury categories are limited to those with more than 500 claims overall. Ranking is based on total claim numbers.