

Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on the May 2020 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

Due to features of the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) methodology, the May 2020 OEWS estimates do not fully reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Estimates for a given reference period are based on a sample of 1.1 million business establishments collected in six semiannual panels for three consecutive years. Each year, two new semiannual survey panels are added, and the two oldest panels are dropped. Older panel wage data are aged to reflect the reference date of the estimates, and employment data are benchmarked to reflect known employment for the average of the two most recent panels. Using six data panels to produce each set of estimates allows data to be produced at very detailed levels of occupation, geography, and industry, but also means that sudden changes in staffing patterns or wages are reflected in the OEWS estimates only gradually.

The May 2020 employment and wage estimates were calculated using data collected in the May 2020, November 2019, May 2019, November 2018, May 2018, and November 2017 semiannual panels. Because five of the six survey panels used to produce the estimates date from before the COVID-19 pandemic, only the most recent (May 2020) survey panel would reflect changes in occupational proportions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The employment from the six panels has been benchmarked to the average of the November 2019 and May 2020 employment from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) for each industry/area cell. The November 2019 QCEW employment data precede the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore do not reflect the effects of the pandemic. The May 2020 QCEW data reflect the early employment effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the OEWS employment estimates are benchmarked to the average of QCEW employment for November 2019 and May 2020, the estimates will reflect only part of the pandemic's impact on employment as of May 2020.

In addition, as a result of the pandemic, response rates for the November 2019 and May 2020 panels were lower in some areas. This is due to the timing of attempts to collect data from employers during the months following both reference dates. Lower response rates may negatively affect data availability and data quality. To minimize the impact, a supplemental nonresponse follow-up mailing and additional targeted nonresponse follow-up were conducted. To reduce follow-up questions from sampled establishments, the program made changes on the data collection website to clarify that establishments where all employees were working remotely, or were not working but received pay, should report their employment and wage data.

If you have questions, [contact the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics staff](#).