

S.342

An act relating to temporary workers' compensation amendments related to COVID-19

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. WORKERS' COMPENSATION; ADMINISTRATIVE  
FLEXIBILITY; TEMPORARY AUTHORITY

(a) In order to effectuate the remedial purpose of Vermont's Workers' Compensation law and to ensure that injured workers are able to obtain the workers' compensation benefits they are entitled to, the Commissioner shall, during a declared state of emergency related to COVID-19, have authority to issue guidance and adopt procedures to extend deadlines or temporarily amend or waive specific requirements of 21 V.S.A. chapter 9 and the rules adopted pursuant to that chapter.

(b) Any guidance or procedures that are issued or adopted by the Commissioner pursuant to this section shall be effective during the state of emergency in which they are adopted, and the Commissioner shall establish a procedure to transition those claims impacted by the emergency to pre-existing rules within 45 days after the termination of the state of emergency.

(c) The Commissioner shall post any guidance issued or procedure adopted pursuant to this section on the Department's website and shall make reasonable efforts to provide prompt notice of the guidance or procedure to employers, attorneys, and employee organizations.

(d) The Commissioner shall not be required to initiate rulemaking pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 831(c) in relation to any guidance issued or procedure adopted pursuant to this section.

Sec. 2. COVID-19; PRESUMPTION OF COMPENSABILITY

(a)(1) In the case of a front-line worker, disability or death resulting from COVID-19 shall be presumed to be compensable pursuant to 21 V.S.A. chapter 9, provided that the front-line worker receives a positive laboratory test or a diagnosis by a licensed healthcare provider for COVID-19 between March 1, 2020 and January 15, 2021.

(2) As used in this subsection, “front-line worker” means:

(A) a firefighter as defined in 20 V.S.A. § 3151(3) and (4);

(B) a law enforcement officer who has been certified by the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council pursuant to 20 V.S.A. chapter 151;

(C) an ambulance service, emergency medical personnel, first responder service, and volunteer personnel as defined in 24 V.S.A. § 2651;

(D) a worker in a health care facility or in an institution or office where health care services are provided by licensed healthcare professionals;

(E) a correctional officer;

(F) a worker in a long-term care facility or residential care facility;

(G) a childcare provider that is required to provide childcare to the children of other front-line workers pursuant to Executive Order 01-20;

(H) an employee of a pharmacy or a grocery store;

(I) a home health care worker or personal care attendant; and

(J) a worker performing services that the Commissioner determines place the worker at a similarly elevated risk of being exposed to or contracting COVID-19 as the other occupations listed in this subsection (a).

(b) For an employee who is not a front-line worker as defined in subdivision (a)(2) of this section, disability or death resulting from COVID-19 shall be presumed to be compensable pursuant to 21 V.S.A. chapter 9 if the employee receives a positive laboratory test or a diagnosis by a licensed health care provider for COVID-19 between March 1, 2020 and January 15, 2021 and either:

(1) had documented occupational exposure in the course of employment to an individual with COVID-19; or

(2) performed services at a residence or facility with residents or employees who:

(A) were present at the time the services were performed; and either

(B)(i) had COVID-19 at that time; or

(ii) were diagnosed with COVID-19 within a reasonable period of time after the services were performed.

(c) The presumption of compensability in subsections (a) and (b) of this section shall not apply if it is shown by a preponderance of the evidence that

the disease was caused by non-employment-connected risk factors or non-employment-connected exposure.

(d) The presumption of compensability in subsection (a) of this section shall not apply if the employer offers a COVID-19 vaccine that is refused by the worker and the worker is subsequently diagnosed with COVID-19.

(e) The Commissioner shall not be required to initiate rulemaking pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 831(c) in relation to any guidance issued or procedure adopted in relation to this section.

#### Sec. 3. PROSPECTIVE REPEAL

In the absence of legislative action to the contrary, Secs. 1 and 2 of this act are repealed on January 15, 2021.

#### Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.