

**United States Department of Labor
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board**

P.W., Appellant)

and)

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,)
FRESNO VA MEDICAL CENTER, Fresno, CA,)
Employer)
-----)

**Docket No. 23-0714
Issued: August 24, 2023**

Appearances:
Appellant, pro se
Office of Solicitor, for the Director

Case Submitted on the Record

DECISION AND ORDER

Before:

ALEC J. KOROMILAS, Chief Judge
VALERIE D. EVANS-HARRELL, Alternate Judge
JAMES D. MCGINLEY, Alternate Judge

JURISDICTION

On April 21, 2023 appellant filed a timely appeal from a January 4, 2023 merit decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP). Pursuant to the Federal Employees' Compensation Act¹ (FECA) and 20 C.F.R. §§ 501.2(c) and 501.3, the Board has jurisdiction over the merits of this case.

ISSUE

The issue is whether appellant has met his burden of proof to establish entitlement to continuation of pay (COP).

FACTUAL HISTORY

On December 23, 2022 appellant, then a 60-year-old general engineer, filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that on November 14, 2022 he contracted COVID-19 as a result

¹ 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq.*

of working in a medical center building while in the performance of duty. He stopped work on November 14, 2022 and returned on November 28, 2022.

In support of his claim, appellant submitted a rapid antigen laboratory test result, collected on November 14, 2022 which revealed that he tested positive for COVID-19.

OWCP also received an unsigned, undated Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Form 301 injury and illness incident report indicating that appellant had contracted COVID-19 on November 14, 2022.

By decision dated January 4, 2023, OWCP denied appellant's claim for COP, finding that he had not reported his injury on an OWCP-approved form within 30 days of the date of the claimed employment injury. It further noted that the decision did not affect his entitlement to other compensation benefits.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

Section 8118(a) of FECA authorizes COP, not to exceed 45 days, to an employee who has filed a claim for a period of wage loss due to a traumatic injury with his or her immediate superior on a form approved by the Secretary of Labor within the time specified in section 8122(a)(2) of this title.² This latter section provides that written notice of injury shall be given within 30 days.³ The context of section 8122 makes clear that this means within 30 days of the injury.⁴

OWCP's regulations provide, in pertinent part, that to be eligible for COP, an employee must: (1) have a traumatic injury which is job related and the cause of the disability and/or the cause of lost time due to the need for medical examination and treatment; (2) file Form CA-1 within 30 days of the date of the injury; and (3) begin losing time from work due to the traumatic injury within 45 days of the injury.⁵

FECA Bulletin No. 21-09 at subsection II.2, however, provides that, "The FECA program considers COVID-19 to be a traumatic injury since it is contracted during a single workday or shift (*see* 20 C.F.R. § 10.5(ee)), and considers the date of last exposure prior to the medical evidence establishing the COVID-19 diagnosis as the Date of Injury since the precise time of transmission may not always be known due to the nature of the virus."⁶

² *Id.* at § 8118(a).

³ *Id.* at § 8122(a)(2).

⁴ *E.M.*, Docket No. 20-0837 (issued January 27, 2021); *J.S.*, Docket No. 18-1086 (issued January 17, 2019); *Robert M. Kimzey*, 40 ECAB 762-64 (1989); *Myra Lenburg*, 36 ECAB 487, 489 (1985).

⁵ 20 C.F.R. § 10.205(a)(1-3); *see also T.S.*, Docket No. 19-1228 (issued December 9, 2019); *J.M.*, Docket No. 09-1563 (issued February 26, 2010); *Dodge Osborne*, 44 ECAB 849 (1993); *William E. Ostertag*, 33 ECAB 1925 (1982).

⁶ FECA Bulletin No. 21-09.II.2 (issued April 29, 2021). On March 11, 2021 the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) was signed into law. Pub. L. No. 117 2. OWCP issued FECA Bulletin No. 21-09 to provide guidance regarding the processing of COVID-19 FECA claims as set forth in the ARPA. Previously, COVID-19 claims under FECA were processed under the guidelines provided by FECA Bulletin No. 20-05 (issued March 31, 2020) and FECA Bulletin No. 21-01 (issued October 21, 2020). FECA Bulletin No. 21-09 supersedes FECA Bulletin Nos. 20-05 and 21-01.

ANALYSIS

The Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof to establish entitlement to COP.

The record reflects that appellant filed his Form CA-1 on December 23, 2022. He stopped work on November 14, 2022 alleging that on November 14, 2022 he was exposed to COVID-19 while he was working in a medical center building. As previously noted, FECA Bulletin No. 21-09 defines date of injury as the date of last exposure, which in this case was November 14, 2022.⁷ Because appellant filed his Form CA-1 on December 23, 2022 the Board finds that it was not filed within 30 days of the alleged November 14, 2022 employment injury, and, thus, he has not met his burden of proof.⁸

Appellant may submit new evidence or argument with a written request for reconsideration to OWCP within one year of this merit decision, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 8128(a) and 20 C.F.R. §§ 10.605 through 10.607.

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof to establish entitlement to COP.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *See T.J.*, Docket No. 23-0003 (issued April 26, 2023); *see also J.C.*, Docket No. 22-0666 (issued October 26, 2022).

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the January 4, 2023 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is affirmed.

Issued: August 24, 2023
Washington, DC

Alec J. Koromilas, Chief Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

Valerie D. Evans-Harrell, Alternate Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

James D. McGinley, Alternate Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board