

MOHSS Quarterly Newsletter

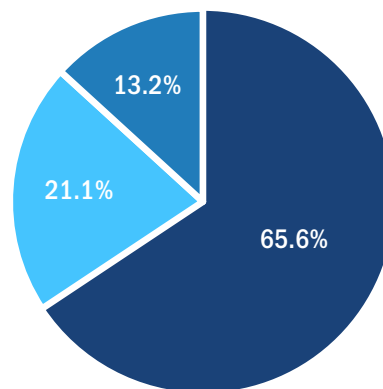
BACK TO SCHOOL

Occupational Safety Guidance for Montana Educators

With summer coming to an end, schools around Montana are back in session. The return to the classroom after months of relaxation can be bittersweet for students and teachers alike. Unfortunately, the start of the school year also has one of the highest rates of workplace injury in education. This newsletter will identify the common sources of injury to Montana's educators and provide guidance on having the safest school year possible.

Overview of the Education Employment

Education is one of the largest sources of employment in Montana, with over 8% of the state workforce holding jobs in schools. About 43,000 employees work during the school year.¹ Most of these educators work in K-12 public schools around the state, while the remainder work either for public colleges or for private schools. In terms of occupation, most employees are classified as teachers or teachers' assistants, although occupations also include office and administrative support staff, custodial staff, nurses, special education teachers, food prep staff, and administrators. Staff are employed in nearly all communities around Montana with higher concentrations in counties containing a college.

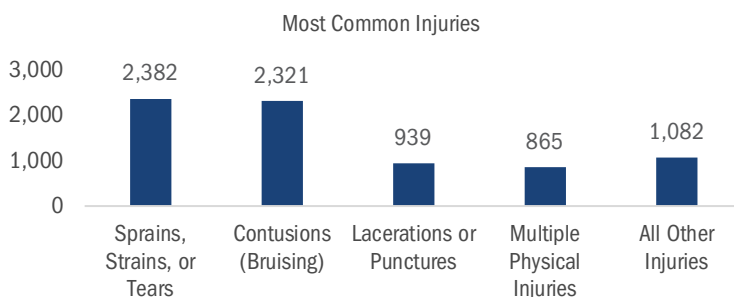
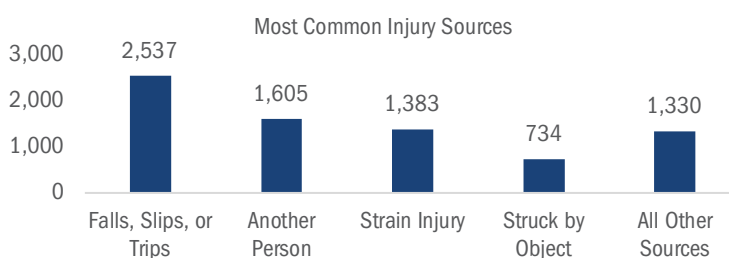


■ K-12 Public ■ Public Colleges ■ All Private Schools

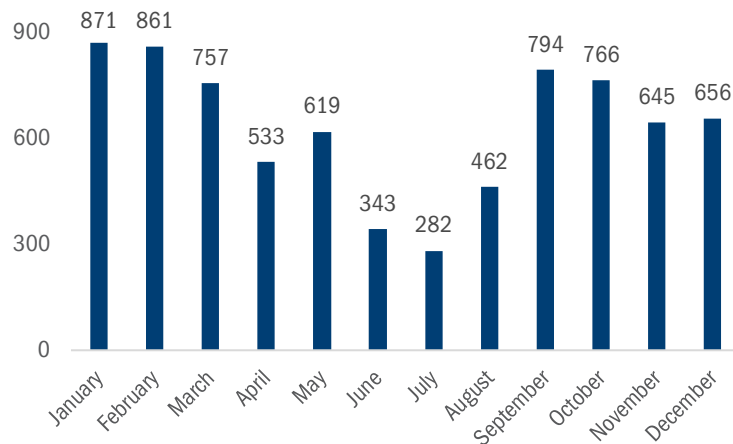
Overview of Workplace Injuries in Education

In the past three school years, educators reported over 7,500 workplace injuries to the Montana Department of Labor & Industry (DLI).² The injury details identify common sources of injury, which include

- The most common injuries are sprains, strains, or tears or contusions (bruising), each accounting for roughly a third of all injuries reported.
- The most common sources of injury are falls, slips, or trips, contact with another person, or strains from lifting, twisting, and repetitive motion.



- Injuries were reported at the highest rate in the mid-winter months (January-February) and the early fall months (September-October).
- Examining injury source by month, most sources do not experience substantial changes. However, injuries caused by another person occur at a high frequency early in the school year compared to all other months, and fall injuries occur at a high frequency during winter months.



Staying Safe Throughout the School Year

Reviewing the details of injury from the past few school years helps identify hazards, which helps guide the process of improving workplace safety. In addition to advising educators to undergo generalized safety training, the Montana Occupational Health and Safety Surveillance (MOHSS) Program recommends educators remain particularly vigilant of the following hazards in the coming school year:

- **Student Escalation:** In the past year, the DLI has released multiple reports identifying education settings as having the greatest instance of workplace violence of any workplace, primarily due to student assaults on school staff.³ The best steps for countering the threat of student assault include training teachers on de-escalation and bolstering school counseling and mental health resources. De-escalation training resources are available to many healthcare, social service, and law enforcement agencies and can be adapted for schools. Resources can be found through the [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#), from [Defuse De-Escalation Training](#), and from the [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#).
- **Falling Injuries:** Most falls in education are same-level falls, often caused by slippery walking surfaces, but also attributable to objects in the walkway or uneven surfaces. Simple cleanup of walking areas can resolve most of the issue, along with repairing damaged walking spaces, ensuring proper lighting, and posting signage on wet or icy surfaces. More information can be found at [SafetyTalkIdeas.com](#) or from the [National Safety Council](#).
- **Lifting Injuries:** Lifting is the leading reason for strain injuries in educators. While lifting or handling heavy loads is not a primary task for most workers in education, the knowledge of how to safely lift, push, or pull objects is vital for avoiding injury. Information on safe lifting techniques can be found through the [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#).

Sources

¹ From the [Montana Department of Labor & Industry's Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, performed by the DLI Workforce Services Division and reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Note: The "school year employment" is calculated from an average of Q1, Q2, and Q4 employment. Q3 employment figures are artificially low due to census information being recorded outside of the school year, which lowers the annual average to roughly 40,000.

² From the Montana Department of Labor & Industry's Workers Compensation Administrative Network maintained by the DLI Employment Standards Division. [Analysis of this data was performed directly for this report, and findings from other DLI-ESD publications such as the annual workers' compensation report were incorporated.](#)

³ From the [Montana Department of Labor & Industry's reports on workplace violence](#).