

employment. She explained that on or about May 29, 2025 she cleaned and set up a room, and assisted a physician with patients. Appellant indicated that she first became aware of her condition on May 30, 2025, tested positive for COVID-19 on a June 1, 2025 antigen test, and realized her condition's relation to her federal employment on June 8, 2025. She stopped work on May 31, 2025 and returned to work on June 9, 2025.

In a development letter dated June 17, 2025, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of her claim. It advised her of the type of factual and medical evidence needed and provided a questionnaire for her completion. OWCP afforded appellant 60 days to respond. In a development letter of even date, it also requested additional information from the employing establishment. OWCP afforded the employing establishment 30 days to respond.

In a June 18, 2025 statement, the employing establishment related information from the dentist appellant worked with. On or about May 27, 2025, appellant worked between 15 minutes and 4 hours in close proximity to the dentist who tested positive for COVID-19 on May 31, 2025. She wore personal protective equipment (PPE) while assisting the dentist and preparing and cleaning the operatory. The dentist also wore PPE. The employing establishment also submitted a copy of appellant's official position description.

OWCP subsequently received a June 4, 2025 report of a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test result with the collection date redacted, indicating that appellant had tested positive for COVID-19.

In a follow-up letter dated July 29, 2025, OWCP advised appellant that it had conducted an interim review, and the evidence remained insufficient to establish her claim. It noted that she had 60 days from the June 17, 2025 letter to submit the necessary evidence. OWCP further advised that if the evidence was not received during this time, it would issue a decision based on the evidence contained in the record.

OWCP subsequently received a June 4, 2025 laboratory PCR test result, indicating that appellant tested positive for COVID-19.

By decision dated September 18, 2025, OWCP denied appellant's occupational disease claim. It found that she had not submitted medical evidence sufficient to establish that her diagnosed COVID-19 condition was causally related to the accepted employment exposure.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

An employee seeking benefits under FECA² has the burden of proof to establish the essential elements of his or her claim, including that the individual is an employee of the United States within the meaning of FECA, that the claim was timely filed within the applicable time

² *Id.*

limitation of FECA,³ that an injury was sustained in the performance of duty as alleged, and that any disability or medical condition for which compensation is claimed is causally related to the employment injury.⁴ These are the essential elements of each and every compensation claim, regardless of whether the claim is predicated upon a traumatic injury or an occupational disease.⁵

To establish a claim for COVID-19 diagnosed after January 27, 2023, a claimant must provide: (1) evidence of a COVID-19 diagnosis; (2) evidence that establishes the claimant actually experienced the employment incident(s) or factor(s) alleged to have occurred; (3) evidence that the alleged incident(s) or factor(s) occurred while in the performance of duty; and (4) evidence that the COVID-19 condition is found by a physician to be causally related to the accepted employment incident(s) or factor(s). A rationalized medical report establishing a causal link between a diagnosis of COVID-19 and the accepted employment incident(s)/factor(s) is required in all claims for COVID-19 diagnosed after January 27, 2023.⁶

ANALYSIS

The Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof to establish a diagnosis of COVID-19 causally related to the accepted employment exposure.

In support of her claim, appellant submitted the results of a laboratory COVID-19 PCR test dated June 4, 2025 which revealed that she tested positive for COVID-19. The Board has held that diagnostic studies, standing alone, lack probative value as they do not address whether the employment exposure caused the diagnosed medical condition.⁷ Thus, this evidence is insufficient to establish the claim.

As the medical evidence of record is insufficient to establish causal relationship between appellant's diagnosed COVID-19 condition and the accepted employment exposure, the Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof.

³ See *F.H.*, Docket No. 18-0869 (issued January 29, 2020); *J.P.*, Docket No. 19-0129 (issued December 13, 2019); *Joe D. Cameron*, 41 ECAB 153 (1989).

⁴ *L.C.*, Docket No. 19-1301 (issued January 29, 2020); *J.H.*, Docket No. 18-1637 (issued January 29, 2020); *James E. Chadden, Sr.*, 40 ECAB 312 (1988).

⁵ *P.A.*, Docket No. 18-0559 (issued January 29, 2020); *K.M.*, Docket No. 15-1660 (issued September 16, 2016); *Delores C. Ellyett*, 41 ECAB 992 (1990).

⁶ FECA Bulletin No. 23-02 (issued December 15, 2022). In accordance with the Congressional intent to end the specialized treatment of COVID-19 claims for Federal workers' compensation under section 4016 of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, Public Law 117-2 (March 11, 2021), OWCP issued FECA Bulletin No. 23-02, which updated its procedures for processing claims for COVID-19 diagnosed after January 27, 2023.

⁷ See *S.P.*, Docket No. 25-0265 (issued March 10, 2025); *M.S.*, Docket No. 22-0417 (issued August 8, 2022); *S.H.*, Docket No. 20-0113 (issued June 24, 2020); *M.L.*, Docket No. 18-0153 (issued January 22, 2020).

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 her burden of proof to establish a diagnosis of COVID-19 causally related to the accepted employment exposure.

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the September 18, 2025 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is affirmed.

Issued: February 12, 2026
Washington, DC

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

Janice B. Askin, Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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