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These are the most dangerous jobs in America in the age of coronavirus

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KEY POINTS

A study by Marissa Baker, an assistant professor in the University of Washington School of Public Health, looked at the jobs in the U.S. that posed the most danger to infectious disease such as Covid-19.

It found that 10% of workers in the United States face exposure to infection at





also at higher risk.



Medical staff attends to a patient suffering from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), at Scripps Mercy Hospital in Chula Vista, California, May 12, 2020.

Lucy Nicholson | Reuters

Medical professionals who work with sick individuals have always been at risk for infectious disease, but that risk has gone up exponentially amid the coronavirus pandemic, creating an overall feeling that such jobs have become much more dangerous.

“With this virus coming in, and its focus on elders, we’re ground zero,” says Kimberly Green, chief operating officer at Diakonos Group, an Edmund, Oklahoma-based long-term care provider. “For our staff, it changes everything.”

The company has spent \$700,000 on new personal protective equipment for its 1,200 employees, instituted new rules about who can enter the buildings, and invested



with such measures more than 10 staff and clients contracted the virus.

So Green wasn't surprised at all to hear that healthcare workers took the top two spots on study looking at U.S. workers most at risk for infection or disease. The [study](#), released in April and conducted by Marissa Baker, an assistant professor in the University of Washington School of Public Health, found that 10% of workers in the United States face exposure to infection at least once a week, and nearly 18.4% face such exposure at least once a month. That number includes farmworkers, but does not include self-employed workers, household employees, or freelance workers.

Those numbers are likely far lower than the actual figures, since they doesn't include gig workers, such as food delivery workers or rideshare drivers who are also at higher risk. Also, the study relied on a survey conducted before the novel coronavirus began to spread, and many workers, such as those in meatpacking plants or grocery stores, may not have been aware of the extent their actual exposure to infectious diseases.

“We now have a lot more public consciousness and knowledge about what constitutes an exposure to an infectious disease, which is anytime that you interact with another person,” Baker says.

While some frontline workers like police officers and firefighters have always known that their job carries inherent risk, it may be an adjustment for others, says Robert Hughes, an assistant professor in the legal studies and business ethic department of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

“When people go into nursing, unless they're going into specific kinds, they're not thinking that it's a physically dangerous job,” he says. “They know that infectious disease exists, but the degree to which it is dangerous has changed.”

As the country re-opens and more companies start bringing employees back on site, they're looking for ways to mitigate those risks, from closing down breakrooms where people congregate to requiring handwashing at regular intervals.

“There's going to be a whole industry of workplace safety consultants that will redesign



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work. Once we're through this, there will be future pathogens.

There's a growing recognition that jobs that can't be done while safely social distancing inherently carries a high risk than a job that can. That's a change from the way that Americans have typically thought about [dangerous jobs](#), which traditionally have included vocations like logging and fishing.

The risks associated with those types of jobs haven't gone away, of course, says Lorraine Martin, CEO of the National Safety Council, a nonprofit aimed at eliminating preventable deaths in the workplace, homes and communities.

“The workplace risks like falling, substance abuse disorder, accidental overdoses, things falling on you are all still there,” Martin says. “Those high risks are still there. And we're all pretty preoccupied and stressed out, so some of those risks could be exacerbated.”

Here are the five jobs with the most exposure to infectious disease (among employees who are working onsite, rather than telecommuting), according to the Baker's study:

5. Community and social services

(This includes mental health counselors, educators, religious workers, probation officers and social workers.)



Jim Leo, a Deacon at St. John the Evangelist Church in Winthrop, stands beside the casket of a man who died of coronavirus as he waits for the family to arrive for a socially distanced graveside service in Malden, MA on April 28, 2020.

Jessica Rinaldi | Boston Globe | Getty Images

- Total number of workers: 2.2 million
- Percent exposed at least once a month: 32%
- Percent exposed at least once a week: 8%

4. Personal care and services

(This includes fitness instructors, hairstylists and childcare workers.)

Tracy Collie styles Roberta Skivicki's hair at Three-13 Salon, Spa and Boutique, during the phased reopening of businesses and restaurants from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) restrictions in the state, in Marietta, Georgia, April 24, 2020.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSICA RINALDI



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- Percent exposed at least once a month: 52%
- Percent exposed at least once a week: 1%

3. Protective services

(This includes firefighters, police officers and security guards.)

An NYPD Officers helps remove a patient from a house on April 07, 2020 in the Queens borough of New York City. On Monday, 19.3% of the NYPD's uniformed workforce 6,974 people called in sick, according to a press release from the department.

Kena Betancur | Getty Images

- Total number of workers: 5.5 million
- Percent exposed at least once a month: 52%
- Percent exposed at least once a week: 30%



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(This includes doctors, nurses, dentists and pharmacists.)

Doctors and nurses wear personal protective equipment (PPE) as they perform a procedure on a coronavirus COVID-19 patient in the intensive care unit (I.C.U.) at Regional Medical Center on May 21, 2020 in San Jose, California.

Justin Sullivan | Getty Images

- Total number of workers: 8.6 million
- Percent exposed at least once a month: 92%
- Percent exposed at least once a week: 78%

1. Healthcare support services

(This includes home health aides, nursing assistants, physical therapists and medical equipment preparers.)



A nurse takes the temperature and asks coronavirus related questions as a player's guest arrives during the UTR Pro Match Series Day 1 on May 22, 2020 in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Michael Reaves | Getty Images

- Total number of workers: 4.1 million
- Percent exposed at least once a month: 96%
- Percent exposed at least once a week: 77%



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The 10 most dangerous jobs in America

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