

USA: Amazon Is Failing Its Workers during the Coronavirus Crisis

Wednesday 1 April 2020, by [DE.MANUELLE-HALL Joe](#) (Date first published: 18 March 2020).

Employers, like the government, have been slow to respond to the crisis. Amazon initially limited its response to its tech offices, including in Seattle, where two workers tested positive for COVID-19. Office workers were told to work from home through March, and the company stopped employees' "non-essential" travel.

A few days later, Amazon rolled out a policy for workers in its sprawling distribution network. The company directly employs 300,000 workers in its U.S. warehouses, and indirectly employs many more who deliver packages through subcontractors or as independent contractors. Under the new policy, direct employees could take off as much time as needed through the month of March, but it would be unpaid. Amazon warehouse workers don't receive paid sick time in all facilities. In multiple warehouses over the past month, workers discovered that Amazon had been defying local laws requiring paid sick leave.

Warehouse workers organizing in New York City quickly began a petition around paid leave and working conditions. The online petition, targeted at Amazon workers and requiring verification that signers are employed by the company, quickly spread through social media and informal networks.

Days after the petition started circulating, Amazon released a second, expanded policy for workers in its distribution network. With the new scheme, workers who are diagnosed or quarantined receive up to two weeks' paid leave. The company also started a "hardship fund," offering "grants" to workers who may not be eligible for sick time.

Workers organizing the petition say this is not enough. Tests are not universally available, and even if they were, part-time employees don't qualify for Amazon's health insurance. There is no provision for paid time off in case of school or transit closures, or for caring for sick relatives. Organizers are continuing to fight on these issues.

In the meantime, Amazon has responded to confirmed cases of COVID-19 in warehouses in Spain and Italy by refusing to shut down operations. Workers at the company's warehouses in Piacenza and Torranza in Italy went on strike on Monday over health concerns.

<https://www.transnational-strike.info/2020/03/17/no-safety-no-work-amazon-on-strike/>

Facing a shortage of workers and an overflow of orders, the company announced that it would be hiring 100,000 warehouse workers in the U.S. and giving workers a temporary \$2 per hour wage increase.

Whole Foods, which is owned by Amazon, released a similar policy while suggesting that workers donate their paid time off to other workers who need it.

For reference, Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder, makes \$149,353 per minute.

P.S.

<https://labornotes.org/blogs/2020/03/amazon-failing-its-workers-during-coronavirus-crisis>