



**UNITED for
RESPECT**

WALMART'S FAILURE TO PRIORITIZE EMPLOYEE AND PUBLIC HEALTH:

A timeline of dangerous delays and critical missteps
in Walmart's COVID-19 response and what can be
done today to save lives at Walmart

KEY FINDINGS

Walmart's health and safety response to the coronavirus pandemic has been dangerously delayed and wholly inadequate. As this brief reveals, at every critical stage, Walmart failed to fully implement vital public health guidance, and the actions they did take were delayed and insufficient. The corporation waited two, and in some cases seven weeks, before fully adopting major Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for employers. For instance, despite the CDC recommending social distancing strategies and protective partitions for grocery and retail workers in February and March, Walmart didn't start limiting customers in stores or installing sneeze guards until early to mid-April. By this time, thousands of Walmart associates around the country were testing positive for COVID-19 and over a dozen had died.

There is an unfolding public health crisis in Walmart stores around the country. **As of May 11th, at least 22 people who work at Walmart have died and 2,000 have tested positive for COVID-19.** Walmart has not disclosed how many associates have contracted and died from COVID-19, so these April figures are likely to have exponentially increased over the last month. Around 150,000 associates have taken leaves of absence and are too sick or too scared to come to work. Countless more are ill but lack the employer-provided healthcare or access to testing necessary to confirm their cases. Several county health departments have either stepped in to temporarily shut down Walmart stores, or announced exposure risks and community transmission from Walmart locations.

Walmart's failed COVID-19 response is compounded by critical gaps in existing corporate policies, which associates have attempted to bring to the attention of

corporation executives and members of the board of directors for years. Walmart associates have previously and publicly raised concerns about a number of issues including the corporation's punitive leave policies, low-wages that keep many below the federal poverty line, lack of access to full-time hours, and ineligibility for health insurance coverage. In the midst of the coronavirus crisis, associates have been raising concerns about limited access to protective equipment, lax enforcement of social distancing guidelines, and lack of transparency regarding positive COVID-19 cases among associates.

Walmart's emergency leave benefits — and employer-health plan — leave out many workers which is endangering Walmart associates, their families, and the public. Although Congress' Family First Coronavirus Response Act guaranteed 10 emergency paid sick days and 12 weeks emergency paid family leave for workers impacted by coronavirus, Walmart and other large employers were exempt and not required by law to adopt comprehensive leave policies. Walmart only announced changes to the paid leave and sick policies on March 10th, after its first Walmart employee tested positive for COVID-19. Unfortunately, many Walmart associates who are ill, have early symptoms, choose to self-isolate, or need to care for loved ones often cannot count on any additional paid leave under Walmart's "expanded" COVID-19 coverage.

In February 2020, Walmart reported \$141.7 billion in FY 2020 revenues. The corporation saw a 20% increase in US sales in March due to pandemic-related spikes in demand. Instead of providing time-and-a-half or more hazard pay for its 1.5 million US associates, the corporation is providing a paltry \$600 bonus for full-time associates and \$300 bonus for part-time workers

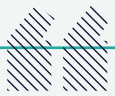
to cover March through the end of June. This only breaks out to about \$37 or \$19 of additional pay per week for full and part-time associates, respectively. Walmart can more than afford to provide hazard pay to its associates and adopt a robust series of health and safety measures to keep associates and customers safer.

What follows is a comprehensive timeline of Walmart's failure to fully implement public health guidance or to effectively mitigate COVID-19 transmission risks in thousands of stores around the country.

While some source material comes from an analysis of Walmart's corporate policies, CDC guidance, press and court records, much of it was informed by frontline hourly associates. Frontline associates have first-hand knowledge of store-level

implementation problems of national policies that fail to address health and safety issues and may be creating the conditions for Walmart to become a vector of community spread of COVID-19.

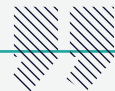
Walmart associates with United for Respect are calling on Walmart CEO Doug McMillon to meet with independent frontline hourly associates, health experts, and community and public policy leaders as part of a COVID-19 Taskforce. Doing so would help ensure that the right policies and procedures are in place at Walmart while providing executives with unbiased feedback on implementation. There is still an opportunity for Walmart to lead during this crisis, but it requires including all stakeholders, even the corporation's toughest critics, in dialogue. The health and safety of associates, their families, customers, and the public deserve nothing less.



Despite Walmart employees being considered 'essential', the corporation failed to fully comply with CDC guidance and keep us safe. There have been over a dozen associate deaths and countless people getting sick due to COVID-19 and little safety and health precautions at our stores. Walmart employees are not sacrificial – it's time we put our people over profit!

CAT DAVIS

*12 year Walmart associate and member
leader of United for Respect*



JANUARY

JAN

31



FEBRUARY

FEB

08

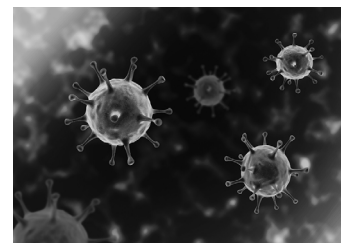


FEB

18



Walmart issues its first corporate memo on the coronavirus outbreak in China, indicating it is limiting travel to China among its corporate staff and increasing hygiene measures in China-based stores.¹



COVID-19 shutterstock.com

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issues “Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).”²

The guidance calls on employers to “actively encourage sick employees to stay home” by ensuring sick leave policies are “flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.”

- The CDC urges employers not to require a doctor’s note and to maintain flexible policies to permit employees to stay home.

The CDC also recommends employers provide routine environmental cleaning, explore social distancing strategies, and develop an infectious disease outbreak response plan based on specific work-related exposure and health risks to their employees.



Walmart releases its earnings report showing total FY20 revenue was \$141.7 billion, an increase of \$2.9 billion. In the US, sales “increased on a two-year stacked basis by 6.0% with continued strength in food and consumables.”³

- The same day the corporation announces a 47th consecutive year of dividend increases for its shareholders.⁴

During a Walmart investment event, Walmart CEO Doug McMillon says the corporation is “managing the issues related to the coronavirus daily [...] We like to keep stores open. Customers need us. We do it with hurricanes in the US. We’re doing it with this situation in China.”⁵

FEB

28



Walmart issues a memo to all US employees on the coronavirus, indicating they are in close communication with the CDC.

- The memo lists preventative measures like washing hands, avoiding contact with sick people, and avoiding touching your face.



Even though Walmart's memo acknowledges that COVID-19 "...appears to mainly be spread through close person-to-person contact," Walmart's memo discusses none of the CDC's February 8th guidance on practicing social distancing between coworkers and customers.

While Walmart indicates the CDC's guidance is "stay[ing] home when sick," they do not adopt any of the CDC's recommendations to ensure flexible and comprehensive sick leave policies in February and will only announce changes to leave policies on March 10th after the first Walmart associate tests positive for COVID-19.⁶

MARCH

MAR

05



Walmart issues travel guidelines for its corporate employees, calling for an end to international travel (except business-critical trips), limiting domestic travel to only essential trips, and increasing remote work/video conferencing.



Walmart's frontline associates are only encouraged to wash their hands and not come to work if they are sick, with no announcement on additional safety measures for essential workers.⁷

I decided to take a Leave of Absence to keep my family and myself safe during this pandemic. As the largest corporate employer in the world, we have a responsibility to use the resources necessary to keep our customers safe and associates supported with hazard pay and paid sick leave for being on the frontline.

CYNTHIA MURRAY

a 20 year Walmart associate and founding member of United for Respect



MAR
10



After a **Walmart** associate in Cynthiana, Kentucky, tests positive for COVID-19, Walmart issues a memo to all associates announcing an “emergency leave policy.”⁸ This policy:

- Waives their attendance policy through the end of April. Before the pandemic this punitive policy gave associates “points” when they called out of shifts. After five points a person would be fired without recourse.⁹

Provides two weeks of paid leave, but only if a store is under mandatory quarantine or if Walmart or the government requires an associate to quarantine.



If someone has a confirmed COVID-19 case, they would receive two weeks paid leave and the potential for additional replacement pay. However, given the limited availability of testing and given many workers don’t have health insurance, this leaves out many sick employees.¹⁰

This emergency leave policy compounds long-standing problems with Walmart’s leave policies.

- **Data from UC Berkeley’s Shift Project before the pandemic, showed 347,000 Walmart associates did not believe they had access to paid sick leave from their employer.**¹¹
- **A national survey of Walmart associates found that 88% of Walmart associates came to work sick under the corporation’s non-emergency leave policies.**¹²

On the same day Walmart announces its emergency leave policy, it indicates its stores have seen increased foot traffic.¹³ In response to widespread panic buying, the corporation said it may limit sale of essential items like cleaning supplies.¹⁴



Walmart deploys new emergency leave policy after Kentucky associate tests positive for coronavirus

PUBLISHED TUE, MAR 10 2020-1:21 PM EDT
UPDATED TUE, MAR 10 2020-3:29 PM EDT



Courtney Reagan
@COURTREGAN

SHARE

MAR
11



The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declares the coronavirus crisis a pandemic.¹⁵

MAR
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A Better Balance announces that “the EEOC recently issued a determination finding probable cause that Walmart’s attendance policy violated the rights of Walmart workers under the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act].”¹⁶ This was the same policy Walmart suspended two days prior.



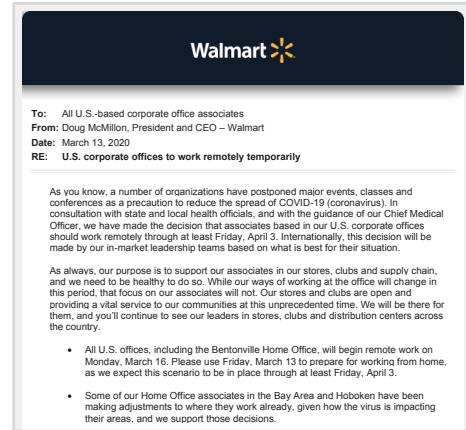
The CDC indicates workplaces can “consider regular health checks (e.g., temperature and respiratory symptom screening) of staff and visitors entering buildings (if feasible)” as mitigation strategies.¹⁷ The CDC also begins recommending that employers check employees’ temperatures daily in hard hit areas like Seattle, Washington.¹⁸

MAR
13



Walmart announces corporate employees will begin working from home.¹⁹

At a Walmart in Pleasant Grove, Texas, “customers were seen tearing apart wrapped pallets of bottled water before employees could stock it on a shelf” and panic buying continues.²⁰



Memo on corporate office employees working remotely

MAR
15



The CDC issues guidance on mass gatherings and large events and recommends postponing or cancelling events with 50 or more individuals.²¹

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The CDC builds on its February 8th guidance and recommends social distancing measures, including avoiding crowded places and putting distance between yourself and others.²²

- The CDC defines social distancing as staying out of crowded places and maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet.²³

MAR
17



The Walmart Foundation announces it will donate \$25 million to global COVID-19 response efforts.²⁴



This philanthropic giving represents less than 0.018% of the corporation’s FY20 revenues reported in February.²⁵

MAR
19



Walmart executives report Black Friday like conditions in stores. Only on April 3, (two weeks later) did Walmart executives take any steps to limit the number of customers in stores. According to many associates, there were not widely known

measures taken by individual stores in the face of corporate Walmart's failure to implement the CDC's social distancing measures. Walmart unnecessarily put employees and customers in harm's way well after much of the country was implementing social distancing.²⁶



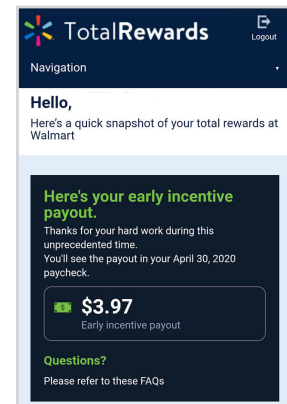
Walmart announces stores will start working “reduced” hours but still be open from 7am to 8:30pm. The Auto Care Centers will close but Vision Care Centers will remain open.²⁷

Walmart's US CEO John Furner sends a memo to associates “We are So Grateful for Your Hard Work.”



Rather than issuing ongoing time-and-a-half or more hazard pay, Walmart announces a one-time bonus — \$300 for full-time hourly associates and \$150 for part-time hourly associates who were employed as of March 1st. Q1 bonuses for hourly associates will also be “accelerated.”²⁸

The corporation announces it will hire 150,000 new associates through the end of May to work in stores, clubs, distribution centers, and fulfillment centers. They will start as temporary workers but might receive permanent roles.²⁹



Walmart's incentive payouts

MAR
21



The CDC issues new guidance to businesses with updated cleaning and disinfection recommendations, best practices on conducting social distancing, and recommendations to respond to COVID-19.³⁰ This includes:

- A new “enhanced” cleaning and disinfection guidance employers must follow after someone with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case was at the workplace.
- **The CDC** encourages employers to promote social distancing by implementing flexible work hours/staggered shifts, increasing physical space between employees, increasing space between employees and customers (e.g. partitions or drive through operations), downsizing operations, and delivering products through curbside pick up or delivery.
- In addition **the CDC** suggests that any employers with multiple locations provide local managers with the authority to adopt recommendations in the CDC's guidance, in order to be responsive to local conditions.

MAR

24



Despite the CDC issuing guidance on social distancing in mid-February, Walmart publishes a press release admitting the corporation had only starting rolling out social distancing measures in late March:

- **“Store and Club Associates Adapt After the First Week of Social Distancing”³¹**
The corporation announces it will install floor decals in stores at entrances and checkout lanes, to indicate 6 feet distances.³² According to the corporation “more hand sanitizer dispensers and wipes have been made available to customers and associates to use while in the store.”³³
- **Despite claiming it is adopting social distancing measures on March 24th, Walmart will wait until April to begin limiting the number of people in stores and taking other steps to ensure social distancing can meaningfully occur.³⁴**
 - **Over 15 US states already have shelter in place orders in effect by the time Walmart begins rolling out any social distancing measures in its stores.³⁵**
- **Walmart announces it will give associates weekly access to their paychecks, rather than two-week checks, administered through a third-party mobile app Even. This excludes associates in New York and over-the-road truck drivers.³⁶**

Walmart announces they will waive fees for telehealth visits for associates with health insurance but a significant number of employees are believed to be excluded from Walmart’s employer health program (including part-time workers who work under 30 hours a week) so waiving a co-pay is a hollow benefit for many associates.³⁷

Walmart says it has started installing plexiglass barriers “sneeze guards” at pharmacies in Walmart’s/Sam’s Clubs. It will “install these guards at the regular Walmart registers over the next 2–3 weeks,” meaning many workers would have no protective barriers until mid-April — a full month after the WHO declared this a pandemic.³⁸

MAR

27



Walmart announces no contact payment options and no contact pickup and delivery services.³⁹



The same day, officials in Comal County, Texas, announce the first community spread COVID-19 case — the person visited a Walmart on March 16th before showing symptoms, according to local officials.⁴⁰

MAR

31



Walmart says it will make masks and gloves available, “as supplies permit,” for associates who ask their supervisors for them. It will reportedly take 1–2 weeks to be available.⁴¹



Nearly twenty days after the CDC lists temperature checks as a COVID-19 workplace mitigation strategy,⁴² Walmart said it would start taking temperatures of US associates as they report to work. However, it could take up to three weeks to roll this out to all locations.⁴³

The CDC's tailored guidance for grocery or food retail worker indicates that "potential sources of exposures include close contact for prolonged periods of time with a customer with COVID-19 and touching your nose, mouth, or eyes after handling items, cash, or merchandise that customers with COVID-19 have touched."⁴⁴



Despite this public health guidance, by the end of March and into early April, Walmart employees are *still* waiting for personal protective equipment like masks and gloves, sneeze guards, and other safety measures to be rolled out across Walmart's stores.⁴⁵ According to the corporation many of these will be phased in in April, despite the CDC issuing guidance and workers sounding the alarm since February.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. Walmart executives are so removed from the reality of what's happening in their stores that they don't understand: our customers can't be served if associates are out sick. What makes it more frustrating, and even scarier, is Walmart is keeping us in the dark about potential and confirmed COVID-19 cases.

JESSIE METCALFE

A Walmart employee from Colorado



Walmart's President and CEO Doug McMillon thanks associates and indicates "on average, we're hiring about 5,000 new associates every day."⁴⁶

The same day United for Respect members sent a letter to CEO McMillon outlining eight key recommendations to protect associates, their families, and customers.⁴⁷



Walmart is forced to shut down its Bethlehem, Pennsylvania warehouse for four days after nine associates contract COVID-19.⁴⁸ Workers at this site report being "packed in like sardines".⁴⁹



Despite workers' ongoing concerns about the inability to effectively socially distance inside crowded Walmart stores — and counter to public health guidance — Walmart waits until April 3rd to begin limiting the number of customers allowed into a store at one time.

- Walmart announces stores will allow up to five customers for each 1,000 square feet of space. However, the average Walmart store is about 180,000 square feet so approximately 900 customers are still permitted in a store under the new restrictions.⁵⁰
- Walmart also says it will begin instituting one way movement through the store aisles the week of April 6th.⁵¹
- Troublingly, 40 states have active shelter in place orders in effect by the time Walmart adopts these measures.⁵²

The same day, a Lexington, Kentucky, Walmart associate tested positive for COVID-19.⁵³

Walmart customers describe packed stores and many shoppers disregarding social distancing guidelines.

- According to one Illinois Walmart customer, “There were so many people in there, it freaked me out [...] People were just coming up next to you and squeezing behind you.”⁵⁴
- According to one Louisiana Walmart customer, “You all packed up, and they said they want you six feet away, but nobody’s caring about it. People are not really taking it seriously. People are really dying.”⁵⁵



The *Wall Street Journal* reports that “Walmart sales from its over 4,700 U.S. stores increased nearly 20%” in the month of March.⁵⁶ Walmart.com online sales have grown more than 30% in recent weeks.⁵⁷



Walmart confirms two Chicago-area Walmart workers — Phillip Thomas, age 48, and Wando Evans, age 51 — died of COVID-19.

- The Evans family has since brought a wrongful-death lawsuit against Walmart.⁵⁸



Wando Evans, who worked at a Walmart in Evergreen Park, Illinois, died from COVID-19 complications on March 25, 2020. Wando Evans, who worked at a Walmart in Evergreen Park, Illinois, died from COVID-19 complications on March 25, 2020.

Courtesy Evans Family

APR
07



On a day when South Dakota only sees 32 new COVID-19 cases, one of the confirmed cases is a Walmart Pharmacy associate in Yankton, SD.⁵⁹

After an associate at a Little Rock, Arkansas, Walmart tests positive for COVID-19, their coworker comes forward as a whistleblower arguing Walmart isn't doing enough to protect associates. Several coworkers who had close contact with the sick employee continue to come to work, and management reportedly calls meetings that violate social distancing guidelines.⁶⁰

APR
08



A Walmart associate in Lynn, Massachusetts — Vitalina Williams, age 59 — dies of COVID-19.⁶¹

On the same day, a fourth associate at a North Las Vegas, Nevada, Walmart tests positive for COVID-19.⁶²

Walmart is still reportedly accepting returned merchandise from customers, although many other stores have ceased the practice during the pandemic.⁶³ It won't temporarily suspend returns until April 20th.⁶⁴

The Boston Globe



Vitalina and David Williams. David Williams (CUSTOM CREDIT)/DAVID WILLIAMS.

APR
09



According to [Walmart](#), “We’re making face masks available for all associates. We are making face masks mandatory in many communities where we are seeing elevated cases, as we recently did in the New Orleans area. We are monitoring this situation closely and will continue to make adjustments to help ensure the health and well-being of our associates and customers.”⁶⁵



An associate and a customer at an Abilene, Texas, Walmart test positive for COVID-19.⁶⁶

APR
10



Three associates in a Hastings, Nebraska, Walmart test positive for COVID-19 after working at Walmart between March 26th and April 5th.⁶⁷

Cumberland County, North Carolina, officials announce an associate at a Fayetteville Walmart tested positive for COVID-19. The county only had 75 confirmed COVID-19 cases on this date.⁶⁸

APR
13

CDC



The United Food and Commercial Workers union publishes results of a 5,000 member survey: 85% of the union’s grocery workers report customers not practicing social distancing across the country.⁶⁹

The CDC calls on employers to “remind customers to maintain 6 feet distance from workers and other customers with verbal announcements on the loudspeaker and written signage.”⁷⁰

- It is unclear how Walmart is assessing or enforcing customer compliance with its new social distancing rules.

APR
14



A second associate tests positive for COVID-19 at an East Greenbush, New York Walmart.⁷¹

APR
16



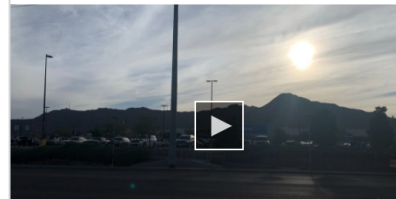
Walmart associates send a letter to Walmart’s Board of Directors raising vital health and safety concerns.⁷²

Walmart customers in El Paso, Texas, indicate Walmart is not following social distancing guidelines, with packed parking lots and crowds similar to the holiday shopping rush.⁷³

KFOX14

Customers say Northeast El Paso Walmart not following social-distancing guidelines

by Jala Washington
Thursday, April 16th 2020



APR
17



Walmart announces it will begin “requiring associates to wear masks or other face coverings at work. This includes our stores, clubs, DCs, FCs and corporate offices. We’ll be encouraging customers and members to wear face coverings when they shop with us.”⁷⁴



Walmart’s announcement comes nearly two weeks after the CDC issued updated guidance to start using masks in areas of significant community-transmission.⁷⁵



Discarded gloves and masks from a Walmart parking lot

Walmart announces it is extending the emergency leave policy through the end of May.⁷⁶

Walmart hires 150,000 new associates in one month. On April 17th, the corporation pledges to hire an additional 50,000 associates.⁷⁷

APR
18

 **An associate at a Perry County, Kentucky, Walmart tests positive for COVID-19.**⁷⁸

 **At least 18 Walmart associates are reported to have died and 2,000 have tested positive for COVID-19. Around 150,000 associates are reportedly on a leave of absence.**⁷⁹

Walmart associates in Apple Valley, California, are sprayed with chemicals by a customer upset over the corporation's new safety policies. It is unclear what steps Walmart takes to protect its associates.⁸⁰

WSJ

Walmart's Coronavirus Challenge Is Just Staying Open

The pandemic has put 10% of its workforce on leave and prompted the retailer to start requiring all staff to wear masks

By [Sarah Nassauer](#)
April 18, 2020 10:54 am ET

SHARE AA TEXT 170

A picture hangs in the office of Walmart Inc. Chief Executive Doug McMillon showing company trucks rolling into New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, an indication of the retailer's pride in quickly restocking stores during the toughest of times.


APR
19

 **After an associate tests positive for COVID-19 in a Vestal, New York, Walmart, county health officials warn anyone who shopped in the grocery department on April 12th to self-quarantine. This Walmart case is one of 142 active COVID-19 cases in the county.**⁸¹

CDC


APR
20

The CDC's safety guidance lays out what employers must do if employees have been exposed to someone with a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case. This includes pre-screening all workers with temperature checks before starting work and regular self-monitoring by the employees; employees should wear masks; employers must clean and disinfect all work areas and increase air exchange in the building.⁸²

 **Madison County, New York, officials warn any members of the public who visited the Oneida Walmart on April 14th to self-monitor for symptoms, after two exposure reports are issued.**⁸³

An Erie County, Pennsylvania, Walmart associate tests positive for COVID-19, in a county with a case total of 56.⁸⁴

APR
22

 **After four Walmart locations in New Jersey closed for one day in the last two weeks, Walmart spokesperson Phillip Keene refuses to disclose if any associates have tested positive for COVID-19.**⁸⁵



My sister and her husband's death could have been prevented if Walmart prioritized associates' safety. Sandra was a cashier and was exposed to thousands of customers a day. She told me that she was concerned that customers were coughing on her and Walmart wasn't providing masks or sneeze guards. Walmart is the largest retailer in the world, they should have been better prepared to keep associates and customers safe.

PAULA SPELLMAN

Sister of Sandra Kunz who worked at a Walmart store in Aurora, Colorado, and passed away due to COVID-19 complications



Walmart is ordered to close by Tri-County Health Department authorities in Colorado after three people connected with the store die of COVID-19, including an associate, her husband, and a store security guard. Six other employees test positive and more await results.⁸⁶

- According to CNN, “The local public health department there briefly ordered the store to shut down in part because of complaints of ‘lack of social distancing’ and ‘too many people in the store at one time.’”⁸⁷

That same day, an associate in Palestine, Texas, Walmart tests positive for COVID-19, in a county with 16 cases.⁸⁸



Walmart announces it will provide three free therapy sessions, ongoing phone counseling, and resources with “tools and tips from experts and other associates to deal with the stress that comes from this period of time.”

The corporation also says any associates who qualify for the 401(k) are allowed to withdraw funds without penalty and taxes may be paid over three years. The corporation said it would provide a one-year extension on 401k loan payments.⁸⁹

APR
27



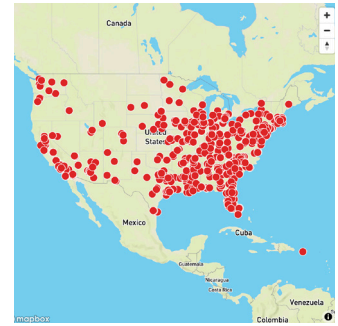
Walmart issues an update on its initiative to offer COVID-19 testing in its parking lots in collaboration with diagnostic companies, indicating nearly 13,000 people have been tested at one of their sites to date. By the end of May, Walmart predicts it may test 20,000 people a week.



The public statement says nothing about testing frontline associates, but does indicate hundreds of associates have been reassigned from their day jobs to coordinate and staff these testing programs.⁹⁰

APR
29

Over 500 Walmart associates around the country stage a day of protest, calling on Walmart to immediately protect the health and safety of its associates. The same day, United for Respect launches a COVID-19 tracker website, www.AreYouSafe.work/, to enable workers to report when colleagues become sick and raise health and safety concerns.⁹¹



www.AreYouSafe.work

APR
30



Walmart announces that since March 19th, the corporation has hired 200,000 additional associates.⁹²

Walmart rolls out Express Delivery, a new service which enables customers to get groceries, toys, electronics, and other products delivered in less than two hours. Some of the corporation's 74,000 personal shoppers will be tasked with these orders.⁹³

MAY

MAY
01



Academics at UC Berkeley and UC San Francisco publish data from a March–April 2020 survey of 8,000 frontline service sector workers. This report shows that when compared to other big box retailers, Walmart is lagging in providing cleaning, gloves, and masks.

- **In the big box sector, Walmart workers surveyed were the least likely to report gloves being available in their stores, with only 42% of workers saying they had access to gloves.**
- **One in three Walmart associates surveyed reported no additional cleaning measures in March and April.**⁹⁴
- **Staggeringly, only 8% of Walmart associates reported having access to masks.**⁹⁵

MAY
02



After 81 Walmart workers test positive for COVID-19 in Worcester, Massachusetts, local officials order Walmart to close. Local officials indicate COVID-19 cases among these Walmart associates were reported as early as April 8th.⁹⁶



MAY
04



A second Massachusetts Walmart, in Quincy, closes after nine associates test positive for COVID-19, one of whom died.⁹⁷

- **According to the Quincy Commissioner of Health, the city had launched an investigation into Walmart with “inspectors there everyday last week due to complaints from employees and patrons concerning overcrowding and lack of social distancing. Employees were also concerned that coworkers may be ill.”⁹⁸**

MAY
05



Walmart announces recipients of its \$25 million COVID-19 philanthropic giving. In the US, Walmart’s grants “support food banks, schools and senior meal programs. The organizations, though different, share an overarching goal: providing access to food for underserved populations — a mission taking on even greater urgency in response to the novel coronavirus.”⁹⁹



- **A 2018 national survey of over 6,000 Walmart associates found that the majority (55%) were food insecure.¹⁰⁰**

The same day, Walmart returns \$12.6 million in federal relief intended by Congress to support struggling doctors and hospitals.¹⁰¹

Texas House Speaker Dennis Bonnen (R) calls out Walmart and other large retailers for their COVID-19 response: “I’m tired of navigating a germ pool in an overcrowded Lowe’s, Home Depot, and Walmart [...] It is time we start calling out the retail giants for their disgusting disregard for the safety of others and the well-being of their neighboring businesses.”¹⁰²

United for Respect, a workers advocacy group, files complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, based on reports from associates, claiming that Walmart is not regularly informing employees when a co-worker is diagnosed, not closing stores for cleaning and disinfecting after coronavirus cases have been diagnosed, and not enforcing social distancing in stores that can have up to 900 customers in them at a time.

MAY
06



Walmart CEO Doug McMillon publishes an op-ed saying, “this crisis has showed there are other people on the front lines – tens of thousands of people we might not normally think of as heroes. They wear a very different uniform. They work at retailers and grocers of all sizes in towns and neighborhoods across the country.”¹⁰³



The same day as this speech, two additional Massachusetts Walmart stores in Avon and Abington are closed over COVID-19.¹⁰⁴

New York County Health officials release a list of possible COVID-19 exposure sites: within Walmart and Sam’s Club stores in Broome, Onondaga, Southern Tier, and Madison, New York regions, dozens of days/times are listed as possible exposure sites.¹⁰⁵

Forbes

May 6, 2020, 12:57pm EDT

6 New Coronavirus Hotspots Around The U.S. Show Disease Still Spreading



Alexandra Sternlicht Forbes Staff
Business
I cover breaking news

MAY
07



The eleven Congresspeople representing all of Massachusetts, including Senator Elizabeth Warren, write to Walmart CEO Doug McMillon “to express serious concern about your company’s failure to keep Walmart employees in Massachusetts safe amidst the coronavirus.”¹⁰⁶



Senator Elizabeth Warren

MAY
12



Walmart announces it is issuing an additional \$300 bonus for full-time associates and \$150 bonus for part-time associates to be paid out on June 25th.¹⁰⁷



Even when combined with Walmart’s initial \$300/\$150 bonuses in March, these bonuses only gave an additional \$37 or \$19 dollars per week to full and part-time associates, respectively.¹⁰⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

The retail industry has fundamentally transformed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Walmart associates are now essential personnel and Walmart is now the world's largest publicly traded retailer.¹⁰⁹ They are also the largest corporate employer in the United States.

As the timeline above shows, Walmart's response to the coronavirus pandemic over the first three months was delayed and inadequate. But the crisis is not over and Walmart associates continue to work in fear of potential exposure.

Walmart can still implement measures that prioritize and protect employee and public health. Walmart associates with United for Respect are calling on Walmart to publicly commit to:

- **Provide hazard pay and family sustaining wages.** Everyday that associates put on the Walmart vest and go into work, they put themselves and their families at risk of contracting coronavirus. Walmart should provide hazard pay at 1.5 times their hourly pay as acknowledgement of this risk and sacrifice. Walmart's recent COVID-19 related bonuses (averaging about \$19 a week for part-time associates and \$37 for full time) are about half as much as the \$2 an hour raises Walmart's

competitors (including Target, Amazon and Costco) provided to their employees, all of which also have a higher base wage of \$15 an hour in 2020, compared to Walmart at \$11 an hour.¹¹⁰

- **Join together with hourly associates affiliated with, health experts, and community and public policy leaders as part of an emergency COVID-19 Taskforce.** Those working directly in the stores have the knowledge and experience to make sure Walmart has the right policies and procedures in place to see us through this crisis.

Walmart associates know how Walmart's emergency paid leave policy is creating unnecessary risk for associates and customers alike, and what changes are needed to allow associates to care for themselves and their families while keeping the public safe. Hourly associates also know how to address the failures in Walmart's social distancing and store cleaning protocols. Because Walmart has failed repeatedly to be forthcoming and transparent about COVID-19 cases, consistent with CDC guidelines, associates stepped in and began tracking and publicizing COVID-19 cases at www.AreYouSafe.Work, to keep each other and the public aware of risks as they arise.¹¹¹

WALMART EXECUTIVES can demonstrate real leadership by listening to and engaging with the unfiltered voices of frontline employees.
As Sam Walton said, "the key to success...is to listen to your associates."

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The Center for Popular Democracy is a nonprofit organization that promotes equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with innovative base-building organizations, organizing networks and alliances, and progressive unions across the country.

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United for Respect elevates the voices of those employed by America's largest low-wage retail corporations and leverages technology – social media and our digital platform, WorkIt – to support people working in retail and bring them into community with one another. Through our online peer networks and on-the-ground base building strategies, we are building a multiracial, women-led movement to move the nation's largest corporations and our elected officials to make retail jobs good jobs – ones that can support our families.

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