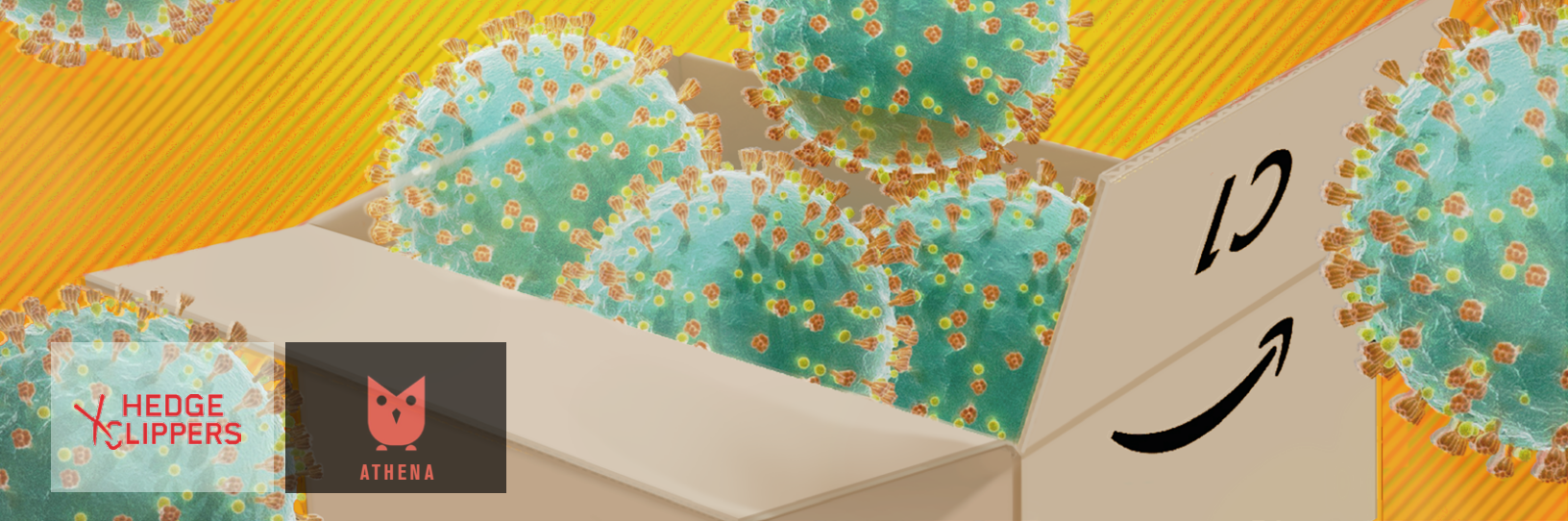
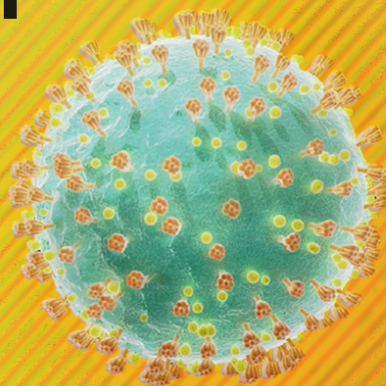
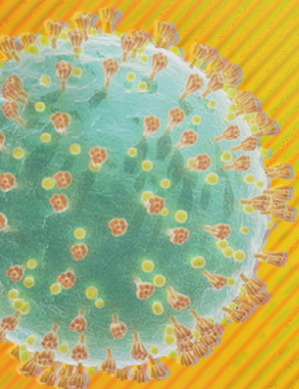
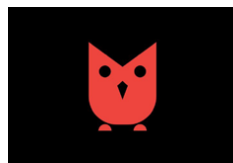


# AMAZON ENDANGERS WORKERS, DELIVERS CONTAGION, REAPS THE PROFIT





*As the coronavirus pandemic rapidly accelerates, workers are sounding the alarm: Amazon's health and safety measures and benefits are wholly inadequate. They are failing to keep workers, families, and the public safe. Unless Amazon adopts an immediate and comprehensive set of safety measures, it stands to fuel the unfolding public health crisis.*



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Hedge Clippers is a national campaign focused on unmasking the dark money schemes and strategies the billionaire elite uses to expand their wealth, consolidate power and obscure accountability for their misdeeds. Hedge Clippers unites working people, communities, racial justice organizations, grassroots activists, students and progressive policy leaders in a bold effort to expose and combat the greed-driven agenda that threatens basic fairness at all levels of American society.

<https://HedgeClippers.org>

Amazon is responsible for not becoming a vector for the coronavirus. The company must protect the health and safety of more than 250,000 people across 110 US warehouses, sub-contracted delivery service partners, and 75,000 Flex drivers, for the sake of workers, their loved ones, and Amazon customers.

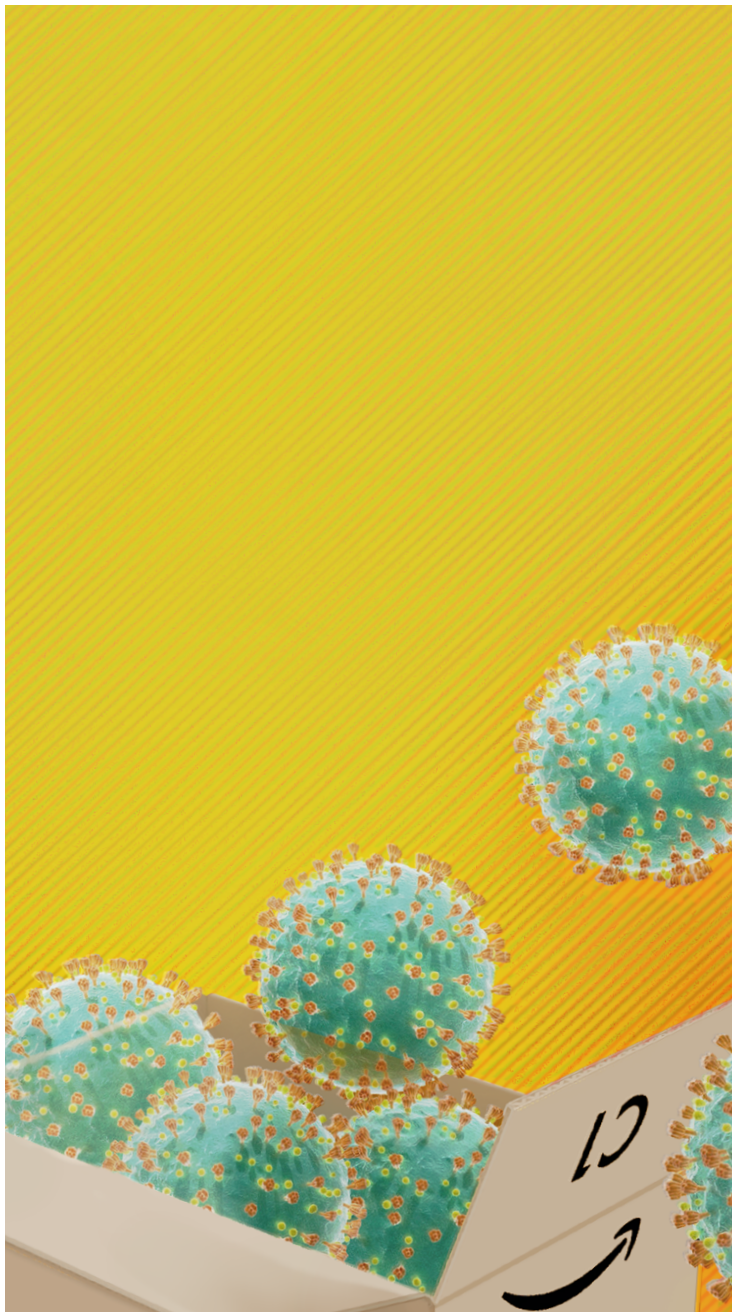
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# INTRODUCTION



*As the US quickly becomes the epicenter of the global coronavirus pandemic, millions of people sheltering in place are increasingly turning to Amazon to secure basic goods. People working throughout Amazon's operations are taking enormous personal risks by continuing to go to work in the midst of a pandemic.*

A single Amazon warehouse can employ thousands of people, which significantly concentrates the risk of transmission.<sup>1</sup>

**As of April 14th, workers and media outlets have reported that nearly 75 Amazon warehouses employ people who have tested positive for COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>**

That number reflects more than half of Amazon's US warehouses and is likely to exponentially increase in the coming days and weeks.



Amazon is responsible for not becoming a vector for the coronavirus. The company must protect the health and safety of more than 250,000 people across 110 US warehouses, sub-contracted delivery service partners, and 75,000 Flex drivers, for the sake of workers, their loved ones, and Amazon customers.<sup>3</sup>

As the coronavirus pandemic rapidly accelerates, workers are sounding the alarm: Amazon's health and safety measures and benefits are wholly inadequate. They are failing to keep workers, families, and the public safe.

**This endangers workers and their loved ones, as well as Amazon customers. Unless Amazon adopts an immediate and comprehensive set of safety measures, it stands to fuel the unfolding public health crisis.**

Amazon has an estimated 112 million Prime users in the United States, representing 44% of the US adult population.<sup>4</sup> As Amazon workers handle products, fill boxes, and deliver them to people's homes, they may pose a risk of spreading coronavirus.

The National Institutes of Health has found coronavirus can live up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to 72 hours on plastic.<sup>5</sup> Amazon's delivery speeds — combined with the surge in demand from millions of customers — pose serious public health risks. If workers are not given adequate personal protective equipment or paid leave, they may unwittingly transit coronavirus to others.

Business Insider, April 5, 2020

*"I'm worried that I have infected 1,000 people in the last three days."*

—Kathy Knight, an Amazon delivery driver in Pennsylvania, who took unpaid leave starting March 30th, out of fear that she was infecting customers.<sup>6</sup>

*"It's leaving us to choose our health or our finances. Everybody looks scared, but we can't afford not to go to work. This disease is killing people on a daily basis. As people are testing positive for it where I work, they still expect for us to come there."*

—Amazon worker and single mother of two school-age children. She works in Houston where at least five workers have tested positive for COVID-19. She spoke anonymously out of fear of retaliation.<sup>7</sup>

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, is the world's richest living person, and the company he runs is valued at \$1 trillion.<sup>8</sup> Given Amazon's monopolistic practices and power in the ecommerce space, the company is positioned to gain enormously from the coronavirus pandemic and resulting surge in online orders. While millions of people are out of work and struggling financially, Amazon and Bezos are profiting. Despite the stock market being in freefall, Amazon's stock prices are solid and climbing.<sup>9</sup> In the first week of February 2020, Bezos sold \$3.4 billion worth of Amazon stock, right before Amazon's stock prices peaked.<sup>10</sup> Amazon and Jeff Bezos can more than afford to take immediate and decisive action to keep Amazon workers safe.

Unfortunately, Bezos has proven unable to helm this important infrastructure during this unfolding crisis. Instead of using his massive fortune to offer robust support to workers, customers, or the public at large, under Bezos' leadership Amazon has rolled out temporary and piecemeal policies that leave out many workers and don't come close to addressing the magnitude and urgency of this crisis. This is true, as well, of Amazon-owned Whole Foods, which made headlines when its CEO John Mackey suggested workers "donate" their paid time off to coworkers who need it.<sup>11</sup>

Amazon is shirking its responsibility to public health and worker health during a national pandemic, while

having the audacity to ask for “voluntary donations” to its Amazon Relief Fund to support workers impacted by coronavirus.<sup>12</sup>

**People of color face disproportionate risks during the coronavirus pandemic, both as frontline workers and as communities bearing the brunt of environmental injustice.** Black and Latino workers are much more likely to be in frontline service and logistics roles.<sup>13</sup> Almost all of Amazon’s Black or Latino workers are concentrated in warehouses, where people of color collectively make up 58% of all workers.<sup>14</sup> They are assuming enormous and disproportionate risks by being asked to continue to work during the pandemic. While Amazon has not disclosed the demographics of sub-contracted delivery drivers, federal data shows that couriers and messengers are twice as likely to be Black than the average worker.<sup>15</sup>

Coronavirus is exacerbating problems within already vulnerable populations. In particular, Black communities face environmental and systemic racism and high rates of poverty and health disparities. As a result, Black communities disproportionately suffer from asthma, heart disease, and diabetes.<sup>16</sup> Based on early data, Black communities are dying from COVID-19 at alarming rates—in Milwaukee 80% of the people who died of COVID-19 are Black despite only making up 26% of the population.<sup>17</sup> In St Louis, all of the people who have died of COVID-19 in the city have been Black.<sup>18</sup> These elevated risks are compounded by Amazon’s operations which often result in enormous environmental impacts.<sup>19</sup> The environmental footprint of Amazon’s warehouses—in particular in communities with high rates of asthma and air pollution—raise serious concerns among workers and their families who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19.<sup>20</sup>

Amazon’s workers are terrified. Not only for their own health, but that of their loved ones and neighbors, as they live in the communities least able to withstand health shocks. Amazon must put policies in place to mitigate these risks and protect its workforce.

*“I’m scared and feeling like they’re trying to hide health risks from the workers. And we’re not being kept in the loop about our safety,”*

—Terrell Worm, a worker at Amazon’s Staten Island warehouse which the company kept open after someone working in the warehouse tested positive for COVID-19.<sup>21</sup>



# RECOMMENDATIONS

*People working for Amazon are providing a vital public service as they enable millions of other people to stay home and still receive essential household items. These workers are now facing an impossible choice: work to secure critical income or protect their own and everyone else's health. Worker health is public health. Amazon must take immediate steps to protect workers and their loved ones—and promote public health.*

## **Amazon must immediately adopt and publish a national, comprehensive health and safety plan in its warehouses and delivery vehicles, including:**

- Fully covering the cost of coronavirus testing and treatment for all warehouse and delivery workers, including directly employed, independent contractors, and subcontracted workers.
- Providing personal protective equipment — such as gloves, additional cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer — to all warehouse and delivery workers to diminish the risk of disease transmission between workers and customers.
- Providing health and safety training for all workers on coronavirus prevention and protection, tailored for specific job duties.
- Shutting down all warehouses with positive COVID-19 cases for two weeks for proper sanitation and until full safety protections are in place, with full pay for all affected workers during the closure.
- Conducting independent health and safety inspections and ongoing monitoring to ensure compliance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other government health guidelines. There must be an independent monitoring body that includes worker health and safety committees.
- Providing transparent, clear, and timely communication about new COVID-19 cases with all employees in impacted facilities.

## **Amazon must immediately overhaul and strengthen its policies and benefits to support workers and their loved ones, and protect public health, including:**

- Updating and strengthening the company's paid leave policies by:
  - Providing fully paid leave for all workers who need to self-quarantine because they or a household member exhibit COVID-19 symptoms, including people without access to COVID-19 testing and diagnosis and any worker sent home for coronavirus concerns, until they are cleared to return.
  - Ensuring full pay to all workers affected by health and safety closures, such as school or daycare closures.
  - Providing longer paid leave periods for any individuals who are older, immunodeficient, with high comorbidity factors and risk for COVID-19 complications, or share living arrangements with someone who is high risk.
- Providing retroactive pay for workers who have needed to take unpaid time off over the past month due to COVID-19 and its effects on our communities.
- Providing hazard pay, at time-and-a-half the rate for regular hours worked, for all workers who are assuming extra risk by coming to work.
- Providing 100% paid leave or childcare subsidies for all workers impacted by school and childcare center closures.

## **Amazon must end low-road practices, including:**

- Ceasing all firings or retaliatory actions against whistleblowers, or workers who speak out in this moment calling for health and safety improvements.
- Ending carve outs and exclusions by extending its full pay and leave benefits to all people who work - direct and indirectly - for every Amazon property, subsidiary, contractor, and subcontractor. This includes Whole Foods, delivery service partners, campus food services, and facility cleaners, as well as all part-time, seasonal workers, and subcontracted workers.
- Eliminating "Time off Task" and productivity quotas to ensure no worker is penalized for taking the time they need to thoroughly wash hands, check in with sick family members, hydrate sufficiently, and more, as often as needed.
- Fully funding the Amazon Relief Fund and no longer ask for donations from the public to subsidize its trillion-dollar company.



## **As a wave of Amazon workers test positive for Covid-19, Amazon is keeping warehouses open or closing for inadequate periods of time.**

These responses endanger workers and fail to follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Guidelines.

Amazon is keeping some facilities open even after people working there have tested positive for COVID-19.<sup>22</sup> This is not limited to the United States: After workers in Amazon warehouses in Spain and Italy developed COVID-19, Amazon also kept those facilities open.<sup>23</sup> In other instances, Amazon is closing facilities for a short and inadequate period of time. For instance, in Queens, New York, Amazon reopened a warehouse just one day after a worker was rushed to the ER for COVID-19.<sup>24</sup>

Amazon must immediately adopt the CDC's recommendations on how to clean facilities with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases. The CDC recommends immediately closing off all areas visited by the person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19. A company must use ventilating fans to increase air circulation and then wait at least 24 hours before even beginning cleaning and disinfection.<sup>25</sup> Cleaning warehouses that range in size from 600,000 to one million square feet requires time.<sup>26</sup> It must be done thoroughly to mitigate risk to workers.

The National Institutes of Health has found coronavirus can live “up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to two to three days on plastic and stainless steel.”<sup>27</sup> More recently, scientists discovered traces of the coronavirus that stayed on surfaces for 17 days in cruise ships hit by the coronavirus.<sup>28</sup> This raises serious questions about Amazon's decision to keep its warehouses open or close for a mere 24 hours after people become sick.

## **Amazon's coronavirus response: A spate of temporary policies that fail to fully protect workers and support public health**

As the coronavirus pandemic rapidly accelerates, Amazon has faced mounting public pressure to improve its benefits and policies. Attorneys General from 14 states and DC have publicly criticized the paid leave policies at Amazon, calling the policies “inadequate to protect the public health during the developing COVID-19 crisis.”<sup>29</sup>

Senators Cory Booker, Bob Menendez, Bernie Sanders, and Sherrod Brown recently urged Amazon to provide paid leave and provide hazard pay at time-and-a-half to its warehouse workers.<sup>30</sup> To date, Amazon has not adopted many of these recommendations and instead is checking the temperatures of workers and sending those with elevated temperatures home without pay.

### **In March 2020, Amazon announced a set of wholly inadequate policy changes in response to coronavirus:**<sup>31</sup>

- All hourly employees would be able to take unlimited unpaid time off through March. Under the usual attendance policy, employees would have been fired by Amazon for taking unpaid time off but Amazon is temporarily relaxing that policy.<sup>32</sup>
- Amazon employees would only receive two weeks of paid leave if diagnosed with COVID-19 or placed into a doctor mandated quarantine.
- Given the limited availability of testing, this policy excluded the vast majority of sick workers. This policy sparked a public outcry and following public pressure, Amazon eventually extended paid leave to people “presumptively diagnosed (but unable to get a test).”<sup>33</sup>

- Amazon's paid leave policy does not include seasonal workers, flex drivers, or the 75,000 drivers who work for Amazon's Delivery Service Partners.<sup>34</sup>

- Instead of providing all workers paid leave, Amazon announced a \$25 million Amazon Relief Fund for seasonal workers, delivery service partners, and Amazon Flex drivers. These workers would be able to apply for grants for "approximately equal to up to two-weeks pay if diagnosed with COVID-19 or placed into quarantine."<sup>35</sup>

- Amazon is raising pay for US warehouse and delivery workers by \$2 per hour through the end of April.<sup>36</sup> This modest increase stands in stark contrast to Jeff Bezos' net worth, which rose from \$105 billion in mid-March to \$121 billion just two weeks later.<sup>37</sup>

- Amazon announced that its hourly warehouse and delivery workers would receive double pay for overtime worked above 40 hours. These changes will run from March 15th through May 9th.<sup>38</sup> Workers report an uptick in mandatory overtime which increases people's exposure risks and limits people's ability to care for their loved ones.

- Amazon announced: "in the short term, we are making the decision to temporarily prioritize household staples, medical supplies and other high-demand products coming into our fulfillment centers so we can more quickly receive, restock and ship these products to customers."<sup>39</sup>

- As of early April, workers report they are still being asked to send non-essential items—such as dolls, video games, dog brushes, and rhinestones—despite Amazon's stated policy.<sup>40</sup> Many workers are also subjected to grueling productivity quotas as they are asked to respond to a surge in demand.

- On April 2nd, Amazon announced it would use its vast internal camera network to monitor for social distancing in warehouses. Workers report that according to Amazon managers this surveillance would be used to identify individuals seen as violating the rules, who would face being fired.<sup>41</sup>

### **After Amazon failed to protect public health, Kentucky Governor steps in to shutdown warehouse.**

In late March, after three Amazon workers tested positive for COVID-19 in a Kentucky Amazon returns warehouse, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear ordered the facility to close to protect public health. While Amazon initially planned to close the facility for just 48 hours, it was ordered by the state to remain closed for a week.<sup>42</sup>

Amazon workers testing positive for COVID-19 aren't isolated in hard-hit areas. States include all regions of the US: New York, California, Oregon, Washington, Georgia, Indiana, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Illinois, Florida, Kentucky, Michigan, Oklahoma, Texas, and Connecticut.<sup>43</sup> As the coronavirus pandemic accelerates, more state governors will need to take swift action to protect public health when Amazon's responses fall short.

## **Amazon workers are sounding the alarm as Amazon fails to protect people in warehouses and delivery roles.**

While Amazon is reportedly spraying disinfectant in warehouses and staggering breaks so fewer workers are congregating together, workers know these measures do not go far enough.<sup>44</sup>

- Amazon is not giving people adequate time to wash their hands. The sprawling warehouses often require workers to walk two to three minutes to the nearest bathrooms and workers are not receiving adequate time for breaks.<sup>45</sup>
- Amazon imposes grueling rates that workers must meet or risk getting written up by supervisors. Amazon has refused to eliminate rate-based write ups, despite the ways this incentivizes workers to rush in ways that hurt health and safety.<sup>46</sup>
- Amazon has not taken enough steps to follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines on maintaining six feet of distance between individuals. Social distancing practices are reportedly very limited within the warehouses.<sup>47</sup>



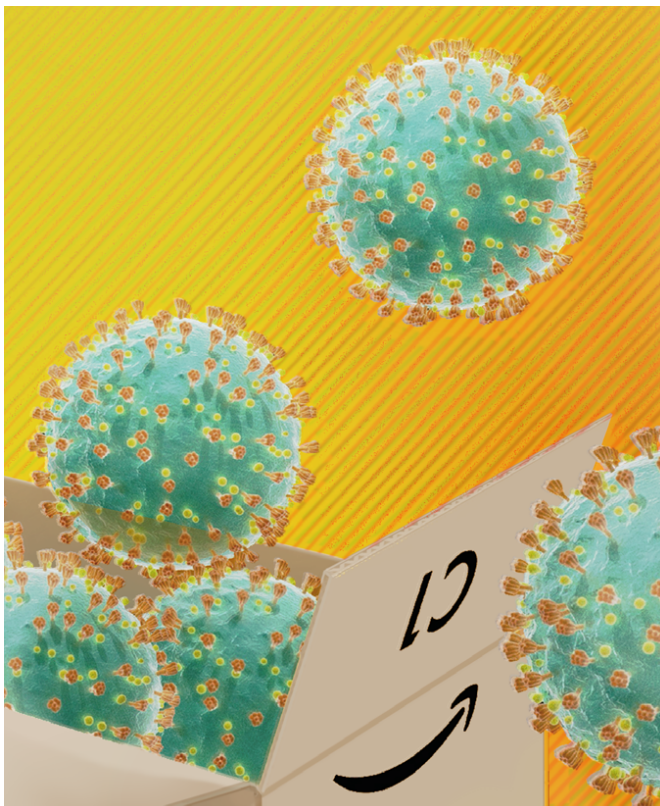
· Instead of taking responsibility for failing to implement social distancing measures, Amazon has decided to target its surveillance network against its own workers, who risk their lives each day coming to work. In early April, Amazon announced its machine learning technologists will use internal cameras to surveil workers.<sup>48</sup> According to Amazon warehouse workers, managers have indicated they will monitor workers and review camera footage to identify individuals seen as violating social distancing rules. Workers can then be disciplined and eventually fired.<sup>49</sup>

- Amazon has also announced plans to hire an additional 100,000 new workers to respond to the uptick in demand, which will further compound the problem of overcrowding in warehouses.<sup>50</sup>
- Amazon is shifting to mandatory overtime in some facilities, where workers are required to work one additional shift each week. Forcing workers to do overtime increases people's exposure risks—both on public transit as people travel to the warehouses and while working in crowded facilities with inadequate safety measures in place. Amazon's policy also prevents people from being with their families and taking care of coronavirus-related needs and precautions during this crisis.

*“I choose my life but, basically, in their opinion, it's the bottom dollar. I'm not receiving pay during this time and it's creating a dire situation for me. I'm basically stuck where I can't collect unemployment. I don't feel safe going to work. I'm concerned about my income, I might be forced to go back. I don't want to go back anytime soon.”*

—Amazon worker in Kentucky who is immunocompromised and at elevated risk for COVID-19.

One Amazon worker in Lexington, Kentucky, shared her story anonymously out of fear of retaliation. The 50 year old woman is immunocompromised and on medicines that make her more susceptible to getting ill. She has decided not to go to work where she might contract this 'potentially life-threatening' disease, but this is putting a tremendous financial strain on her. She reports that Amazon has failed to address the needs of workers who are elderly or who are at elevated risk in this pandemic.<sup>51</sup>



**In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Amazon must take decisive action to protect the health and safety of over 300,000 workers and their families, as well as over 100 million Amazon customers**

**Amazon must provide paid leave without conditions or carve outs that exclude workers. These exclusions endanger its workforce and Amazon customers while posing serious public health risks.**

It is not enough for Amazon to simply provide paid leave to a subset of warehouse workers. Amazon must provide paid leave to all workers, regardless of a

diagnosis or presumptive diagnosis, and across all of its worksites and associated businesses. This includes Whole Foods, delivery service partners, campus food services, and facility cleaners, as well as all part-time, seasonal workers, and subcontracted workers.

The current policies encourage workers to come to work, even if it might be unsafe for themselves, their coworkers, and customers receiving packages.

Amazon's policies also fail to support those who are uniquely at risk for COVID-19, including people who are elderly or who have immunodeficiencies. Those more vulnerable workers must be given sufficient paid leave to prioritize their health. In many cases, that will exceed a two-week time period.

**Amazon must immediately cease firing whistleblowers or retaliating against workers who take action to protect their health.**

In late March, Amazon fired Chris Smalls, a New York warehouse worker who led a workplace action over coronavirus safety concerns. After many of their coworkers at Amazon's JFK8 warehouse in Staten Island tested positive for COVID-19, more than 50 workers staged a walkout, demanding Amazon temporarily close and fully clean the facility.<sup>52</sup> Amazon must immediately cease retaliatory firings of whistleblowers and people taking coordinated action calling for health and safety improvements.

**Amazon must commit to providing hazard pay to all workers.**

Amazon must provide hazard pay at time-and-a-half for all workers who are assuming extra risk by coming to work at an Amazon warehouse or in a delivery vehicle. Amazon must fairly compensate workers who are assuming health and financial risks by continuing to work on site. The additional \$2 more per hour that Amazon is paying doesn't go far enough. Time-and-a-half hazard pay would recognize the vital public service being provided by these workers, which is enabling millions of other people to stay home and still receive household items.

**Amazon must stop enforcing all rate-based quotas, which are forcing workers to work at breakneck speeds and preventing workers from staying safe.**

Even before the coronavirus crisis, Amazon workers faced heavy demands and productivity quotas. Workers are often subjected to grueling quotas that encourage them to work faster and faster. This pandemic is leading to an enormous spike in demand which, in turn, is adding additional pressure on Amazon workers. By ending rate-based quotas, workers will have sufficient time to sanitize packages and work stations and go wash their hands. This will keep Amazon workers and customers safer.

*“They are telling us to wash our hands and wipe down our stations. But we don't get extra time to do this.”*

—William Stolz, who works at an Amazon fulfillment center in Minneapolis<sup>53</sup>

**Amazon must prioritize workplace safety by providing personal protective equipment to all workers, conducting proactive health screening at warehouse entrances, and rolling out safety trainings.**

The company must put proactive steps in place to protect its workers' health and safety. All of Amazon's safety measures must factor in that coronavirus may be spread by someone who is asymptomatic, and through the handling of objects or from droplets.

In early April, the company announced it would conduct thermometer tests for all employees before entering the warehouse, which is a positive step.<sup>54</sup> Amazon must continue this proactive screening, but moving forward, any person with a fever should be sent home with paid leave.

Amazon must immediately provide personal protective equipment — such as gloves, cleaning supplies, and hand sanitizer — to all of its workers while ramping up sanitization of warehouses and delivery vehicles. Amazon's warehouse workers and delivery drivers



report either being given no sanitizing wipes or hand sanitizer or being provided with them in an unreliable way.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, Amazon must immediately roll out trainings for all workers on coronavirus prevention and protection, tailored for specific job duties.

**Amazon must provide childcare subsidies, or paid leave, for Amazon workers impacted by school closures.**

As schools and childcare centers close around the country, Amazon workers are facing a childcare crisis as they balance getting paid and caring for their families. Amazon announced a temporary cell phone process for people who need to reach families and childcare providers, but this does not meaningfully support its workers' childcare needs.<sup>56</sup> Amazon must commit to subsidizing childcare costs for all workers impacted by school and childcare closures, or offer paid leave if childcare services are not available or advisable based on public health guidance.

**Amazon must immediately close and clean any warehouse where someone has tested positive for COVID-19 and provide all impacted workers paid leave.**

Amazon's response to confirmed cases of COVID-19 has been slow and inadequate. Warehouses with confirmed cases should immediately be closed and cleaned for a sufficient period of time in accordance with CDC guidelines. However, closing facilities is not enough. It is critical for Amazon to go one step farther. The company must give workers paid leave at their normal pay rate while the facility is sterilized and all workers are tested for the virus and receive treatment, when applicable.

*“This company makes trillions of dollars. Still, our demands and concerns are falling on deaf ears. It’s crazy. They don’t care if we fall sick. Amazon thinks we are expendable. Because Amazon was so unresponsive, I and other employees who felt the same way decided to stage a walk-out and alert the media to what’s going on. On Tuesday, about 50-60 workers joined us in our walkout. A number of them spoke to the press. It was beautiful, but unfortunately I believe it cost me my job.”*

—Chris Smalls, former Amazon warehouse worker in New York who faced Amazon retaliation

Instead of temporarily closing and disinfecting a Staten Island warehouse after several workers tested positive for COVID-19, Amazon immediately fired Chris Smalls after he took collection action with his colleagues to demand health and safety precautions.<sup>57</sup>

It was later revealed through leaked notes from an internal Amazon meeting attended by Jeff Bezos, that the company planned to smear and discredit the whistleblower as part of a PR strategy. Amazon General Counsel, David Zapolsky, said of Smalls, "He's not smart, or articulate, and to the extent the press wants to focus on us versus him, we will be in a much stronger PR position than simply explaining for the umpteenth time how we're trying to protect workers."<sup>58</sup>

This disgraceful and racialized attempt to discredit Smalls, who is African American, shows the lengths Amazon will go to silence its workers and avoid public accountability. Letitia James, the New York attorney general, is reportedly considering legal action against Amazon for this firing.<sup>59</sup>

## Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos, is the richest living person. He can more than afford to keep his workers and customers safe

Jeff Bezos is the world's richest living person, and the company he runs is valued at \$1 trillion.<sup>60</sup> His astronomical net worth — \$125 billion as of April 12th<sup>61</sup> — stands in stark contrast to Amazon's frontline warehouse employees, who make \$29,000 a year on average.<sup>62</sup> In fact, Bezos makes the average annual salary of one of his warehouse workers every 11.5 seconds.<sup>63</sup>

Bezos stands to gain enormously from the coronavirus pandemic. While Bezos' net worth spiked on February 19, 2020, to \$132 billion, it later dipped to \$105 billion on March 12, 2020 after the stock market plummeted. However, Bezos' net worth has since partially rebounded, totalling \$125 billion.<sup>64</sup> While millions of people are out of work and small businesses around the country struggle to survive, Bezos is amassing billions. Notably, in early February 2020, Bezos sold \$3.4 billion worth of stock, right before Amazon's stock prices peaked, which followed similar stock sales in 2019 and 2017.<sup>65</sup>

Amazon can afford to put robust policies in place to protect its workers and the public from the coronavirus pandemic. Despite the stock market being in freefall, Amazon's stock prices are fairly solid and show no signs of prolonged coronavirus-related downturns. Year to date, Amazon's stock prices have risen 2%, spiking up by 14% on February 20th.<sup>66</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the S&P 500 Index which is down 22% year to date.<sup>67</sup>

In the words of one Amazon worker with COVID-19 symptoms,

*Going to work is risky. It's a scary calculation I make every day.*

Dominica Mercuri works at Amazon's Hazelton, PA facility where as many as 18 of her co-workers have confirmed COVID-19 cases. Dominica started experiencing symptoms of COVID-19—a fever, dry cough, and extreme fatigue—on March 27th. She was unable to get a test from her local hospital. Without a confirmed diagnosis, she has been forced to take unpaid time off.

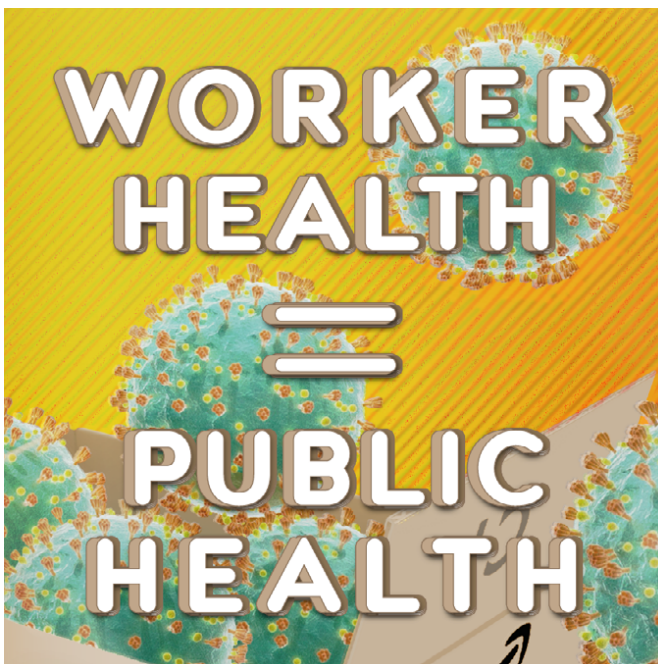
*No pay is hard to live with. I need to get in that building so I can get paid. They're not paying me to stay home since I don't have a diagnosis.*

As an outbound associate, Dominica is responsible for picking, packing, and shipping customers' orders.

After the employees tested positive, she reported that Amazon went “back to business as usual.” She said Amazon's “half measures aren't good enough.” For instance, she's not been able to find hand sanitizing wipes when she needed them.<sup>68</sup>

## **The Coronavirus Pandemic is Amplifying the Grueling and Unsafe Conditions Amazon Workers Already Faced Before the Crisis**

Even before this coronavirus crisis, Amazon was notorious for imposing grueling standards, skirting benefits, and discouraging unionization.<sup>69</sup> Amazon subjects warehouse workers to incredibly demanding and pressure-filled shifts and requires workers meet production quotas that can be set 60 times higher than the industry standard.<sup>70</sup> The company reportedly tracks every action workers take while performing job duties and penalizes workers for deviating from company standards.<sup>71</sup> Not only are Amazon warehouse jobs difficult, they are often dangerous. One report found that seven Amazon workers have died on the job since 2013.<sup>72</sup> Many instances of injuries go unreported, and liability is avoided through the use of subcontractors.<sup>73</sup> According to one Amazon warehouse worker, “they treat us like disposable parts.”<sup>74</sup> The coronavirus pandemic is further compounding these long-standing problems, while also directly endangering the health and safety of Amazon's warehouse workers.



## **What's at Stake if Amazon Continues to Endanger Public Health?**

**Amazon is directly responsible for protecting the health and safety of over 300,000 people. The stakes are high for many of Amazon's workers who are already facing financial precarity or have elevated risk of illness.**

The majority of Amazon's Black and Latino workforce are employed as warehouse workers, suffering the brunt of Amazon's egregious practices. According to Amazon's 2016 U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) report, almost all of Amazon's Black or Latino workers are concentrated in warehouses, where people of color collectively make up 58% of all laborers.<sup>75</sup> While Amazon has not disclosed the demographics of sub-contracted delivery drivers, federal data shows that couriers and messengers are twice as likely to be Black than the average worker.<sup>76</sup>

National trends show that Black and Latino workers are much less likely to be able to work from home, especially those in frontline service and logistics roles.<sup>77</sup> This means that people of color are assuming enormous and disproportionate risks by being asked to continue working during the coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that leaves certain groups especially at risk.<sup>78</sup> Black communities tend to have higher rates of asthma and lower rates of health insurance coverage as a result of environmental and systemic racism.<sup>79</sup> This is leading to disastrous consequences for many Black communities. In Chicago, 68% of the city's COVID-19 fatalities are Black, despite only making up 30% of the city's population.<sup>80</sup> In St. Louis, to date, all of the people who have died of COVID-19 are Black.<sup>81</sup>

Unfortunately, Amazon has warehouses in many of the US cities with the highest asthma prevalence:<sup>82</sup> Louisville, KY; Nashville, TN; Chattanooga, TN;



Memphis, TN; New Haven, CT; Hartford, CT; and Birmingham, AL.<sup>83</sup> This adds to the urgency Amazon should feel in adopting comprehensive and timely policies to support the health, safety, and economic security of its 300,000 person workforce. Amazon must put policies in place to mitigate these risks and protect its workforce.

*“We need a stable and sterile supply chain for the customers and the workers. [Amazon is] putting a lot of people at risk because these things move at an exponential pace. And that means that it can hurt a lot of people in little to no time.”*

—Amazon worker in Arizona who spoke anonymously out of fear of retaliation<sup>84</sup>

### **The stakes are also high for Amazon customers who may be infected**

If Amazon continues to put inadequate protections in place, the company could fuel the public health crisis and create new vectors for disease transmission. At the end of 2019, Amazon had 112 million Prime users in the United States.<sup>85</sup> That represents 44% of the adult population in this country.<sup>86</sup> Given coronavirus can live up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to 72 hours on plastic, Amazon must take every possible safety measure to avoid becoming a disease vector.<sup>87</sup> Worker health is public health: Amazon must support workers and customers alike.

## **States Around the Country Must Intervene if Amazon Fails to Act**

Amazon has proven unwilling to take adequate actions to protect its workers. In March, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear ordered an Amazon facility to close to protect public health after three Amazon warehouse workers tested positive for COVID-19 in a Kentucky Amazon returns facility. The state ordered Amazon to remain closed for a week.<sup>88</sup> With dozens of states around the country seeing confirmed Amazon warehouse cases, more governors and state policymakers will need to take action and intervene if Amazon fails to protect workers and the public.

Business Insider, April 5, 2020

*“I have now visited 190 homes in my community. If that virus is on the box or if I’m carrying the virus and I sneezed or coughed on your package, it’s now sitting on your front porch. The person that answers the door to pick that package up could get that virus off that box or bag.”[...]I’m worried that I have infected 1,000 people in the last three days.”*

—Kathy Knight, an Amazon delivery driver in Pennsylvania, who took unpaid leave starting March 30 out of fear that she was infecting customers.<sup>89</sup>

# CONCLUSION

*The magnitude and severity of the coronavirus pandemic will require Amazon to take decisive action to protect public health. As one of the largest private sector employers in the country, Amazon has a responsibility to the 300,000 people who power its extensive warehouse and delivery operations as well as the over hundred million customers who are relying on Amazon deliveries.<sup>90</sup>*



This report outlined a set of critical recommendations designed to keep working people and the broader public safe. Amazon must provide all workers with full paid leave benefits, personal protective equipment, and safety trainings. The company must take proactive steps to conduct health screenings for workers and close any impacted warehouses while giving workers paid leave. Amazon must end productivity-based quotas and other policies that prevent workers' from following CDC guidelines on handwashing and social distancing. In recognition of the enormous personal health risks and the financial toll this is taking on working families, Amazon must also provide hazard pay to all workers, offer childcare subsidies to those impacted by school and childcare closures, and fully fund a robust hardship fund without soliciting donations from the public. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos can more than afford a robust response. The stakes are too high, and inaction could threaten the lives of countless Amazon workers and customers.

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