

# Former Amazon worker Jana Jumpp says the nearly 1,600 COVID-19 cases she has counted in warehouses are “just the tip of the iceberg”

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Former Amazon worker Jana Jumpp recently spoke to the *International Amazon Workers Voice* about the statistics she has been gathering and distributing on social media regarding infections and deaths from the coronavirus among Amazon workers. To date, she has counted 1,573 reported COVID-19 cases at Amazon, and she has been able to specifically confirm 1,400 of those.

The cases she has tracked are spread out across 244 locations worldwide, including 236 in the US. She has tracked at least nine Amazon worker deaths in Ohio, California, Missouri, New York, Texas, Illinois, and Indiana. But she says, “I think this is just the tip of the iceberg.”

The statistics she has gathered show alarming numbers of infections at many workplaces, including 70 at EWR9 (Carteret, New Jersey), 48 at EWR8 (Teterboro, New Jersey), 48 at LGA9 (Edison, New Jersey), 90 at JFK8 (Staten Island, New York), 74 at AVP1 (Hazleton, Pennsylvania), 29 at HOU2 (Houston, Texas), 10 at PHX6 (Phoenix, Arizona), 18 at RIC2 (Chester, Virginia), 23 at BDL2 (Windsor, Connecticut), 35 at BDL2 (North Haven, Connecticut) and 10 at DMI3 (Miami, Florida). She also counted 16 at MDW2 (Joliet, Illinois), 14 at MDW7 (Monee, Illinois), 20 at IND1 (Whitestown, Indiana), 14 at CVG2 (Hebron, Kentucky), 12 at DCA1 (Sparrows Point, Maryland), 11 at BOS5 (Stoughton, Massachusetts), 19 at DTW1 (Romulus, Michigan), and 14 at SDF8 (Jeffersonville, Indiana where Jana worked) among hundreds of other workplaces.

“Texas is blowing up right now,” she said. Some warehouses are “hotspots.”

Her spreadsheets and statistics, while not a scientific study, are the only serious effort to date to make a comprehensive tally of the numbers of Amazon workers who have fallen ill or who have died from the virus during the pandemic.

Amazon refuses to report these statistics, despite growing popular demands for this information to be made public. The \$1.3 trillion international conglomerate, which profited enormously from the beginning of the pandemic on account of increased demand for online shopping, is seeking to keep workers and the public in the dark about the deadly risks involved with working during the pandemic.

With Amazon refusing to disclose these numbers, Jana’s statistics have been widely reported in the US and around the

world, including in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Miami Herald*, the *Seattle Times*, the *Intercept*, and others, as well as on CNBC, CBS News, and National Public Radio.

Jana, 58, worked for Amazon for four and a half years at the SDF8 facility in Jeffersonville, Indiana. She also works as a dental assistant and a massage therapist.

“When this all started, I was getting shocked,” she said. “The only thing they offered me was to stay home without pay.”

“Around the end of March, we started having multiple cases,” she continued. “We started having cases in the facility, confirmed cases.”

She became involved in social media groups online, one of which she later found out was run by United for Respect, which in turn is backed by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) union. Through this connection, she was asked to speak at a press conference, she said. “Along with some Wal Mart employees, I wrote a statement and said what I really thought.” She recalled hearing part of her statement later played on National Public Radio.

It was around this time she decided to begin gathering statistics. “I had the time to do it, and I knew this would be important data,” she said. “Amazon was not going to be forthcoming with their data. Somebody needed to track it.”

However, as time went on, she said, “It started getting harder.” At first, she was “just doing it on notepad and paper.” She was later contacted by a student journalist from Berkeley. “He got me set up with my current spreadsheet.”

For each report of infections among Amazon workers, Jana tracks the name of the Amazon facility involved, the city and state, the source of the information, the number of reported infections, and the number of reported deaths, among other information.

It is Amazon’s practice to send out text or voice messages to workers at particular warehouses after a coronavirus infection is confirmed. Jana gathers and saves these messages, forwarded from workers, which she uses to confirm each and every reported case. In her spreadsheets, the word “confirmed” means, “I have a text or a voicemail from the facility confirming it.” She also takes pains to ensure that there are no duplicate entries on her lists.

Active on social media, including in the Facebook group “Amazon Facilities COV19 Reporting Page,” she has become a

central hub to which workers are gathering and sending information. Jana works to separate fact from rumor and suspicion and to independently verify each report. She may receive a report, for example, that a worker has died, but the fallen worker's co-workers do not know why. She usually receives 10 to 15 reports per day, many from workers who request to remain anonymous out of fear of management retaliation.

During the invasion and occupation of Iraq, beginning in 2003, the US military refused to provide body counts of Iraqi victims. In the early years of the war there were independent efforts to gather statistics based on media reports and accounts of individual atrocities. These studies arrived at sums in the tens of thousands of people, but they were eventually dwarfed by a Johns Hopkins study applying epidemiological methods that estimated 650,000 Iraqi war dead as of 2007.

Likewise, Jana freely concedes that the true numbers of Amazon casualties are likely much higher than the numbers her study has been able to compile. Amazon, for example, does not report infections and deaths among employees of third-party contractors, such as security or technicians. "All of the robotics facilities have technicians that are not Amazon employees."

Indeed, Amazon workers in contact with the *International Amazon Workers Voice* reported higher numbers of suspected cases at their own facilities than the figures confirmed on Jana's spreadsheets.

Asked about United for Respect, Jana said she was not aware of the connection to the UFCW. But thus far, she says, she has resisted efforts to bring her project under the wing of the unions or other organizations in the orbit of the Democratic Party. She said, "I consider myself a freelancer. I don't want anyone telling me what to do."

As the numbers of infections and deaths mount at Amazon, the company is cracking down on dissent within the workforce. Workers are being told that they will be terminated for speaking publicly about the company, including on social media.

Amazon has hired as many as 175,000 new workers during the pandemic to meet high demand and to replace workers who fell ill or who could not work during the lockdown on account of childcare and other responsibilities.

While doing little to nothing to actually protect workers from the spread of the deadly disease, Amazon is aggressively using its "social distancing" policies to isolate workers and prevent any discussions in the workplace. According to *Wired* magazine, the company has recently unveiled an "artificial intelligence system that analyzes images from security cameras in Amazon facilities and alerts management of potential social distancing violations."

This dystopian system is called Proxemics. According to the report in *Wired*, one feature of Proxemics "alerts managers in a building immediately if a camera sees 15 or more people at the same time and a reviewer confirms it."

Workers in the US are also being told that they cannot have information about the total number of infections and deaths because that would violate the privacy of the sick workers and HIPAA (the US Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act). This is false.

Amazon's disclosure of the total number workers infected and

killed at its warehouses would not involve disclosing any of the personal health information of individual workers, such as names, social security numbers, email addresses, medical record numbers, or other information protected by HIPAA. In addition, the HIPAA laws and regulations acknowledge that its provisions can be relaxed or waived during a pandemic, for example, "as necessary to avert or mitigate a serious and imminent threat to the health and safety of other individuals."

Indeed, last month, the attorneys general of 13 US states formally demanded that Amazon and Whole Foods provide detailed statistics on the number of workers who have been infected and killed. But Amazon blew off this request, correctly predicting that nothing would come of it. Indeed, instead of taking legal action against Amazon executives for recklessly endangering lives in the pursuit of profit, the state authorities have taken no meaningful measures in response to the company's flagrant refusal to cooperate with public health authorities.

On Friday, it was reported that the federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) was investigating complaints at Amazon warehouses in Kenosha, Wisconsin, where at least 60 workers have fallen ill. "I get one text nearly every day from that facility," Jana said. "At least one. Every day."

Amazon will not be deterred by the belated interventions from OSHA, a toothless institution decimated by decades of budget cuts. Joining the Trump administration's drive to "reopen" the economy last month, Amazon eliminated the \$2 pay increase it implemented in the early stages of the pandemic and also terminated its policy of allowing unpaid time off.

Confronted with incompetence, inaction, and willful neglect on the part of the entire political establishment from top to bottom, the *International Amazon Workers Voice* is assisting Amazon workers in forming workplace committees to put forward their own demands and interests. The formation of these committees is a basic question of workers' collective self-defense.

Workers have every right to demand detailed, accurate, and prompt information about infections and deaths in their facility and worldwide. Management's refusal to disclose such information is completely unacceptable and should not be tolerated under any pretext.

Jana took pride in her work at Amazon before the pandemic, she said, although she did experience the physical toil and psychological stress. "It was annoying. Physically annoying. But after this. . .," she said, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"They are endangering people. They are bringing it home to their families. To their roommates, fiancées, spouses," she said.

As for her statistics, she reiterated, "I truly believe this is just the tip of the iceberg."



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