

# Woman died from COVID-19 on Spirit Airline flight in July

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A woman from Garland, Texas, died from COVID-19 while on a Spirit Airlines flight from Las Vegas, Nevada, to Texas on the evening of July 24. Her death was confirmed by Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins on Sunday while announcing 592 infections and three deaths in the county. The woman fell unconscious and stopped breathing on the flight, which was diverted to Albuquerque, New Mexico. A member of the crew attempted to perform sustained CPR and subsequently passed out from exhaustion. Despite further efforts by emergency crews once the plane landed, they were unable to resuscitate her. The woman had underlying medical conditions including asthma and morbid obesity.

That this case was just announced nearly three months later means that the whole cabin, medical crews and many people in the airport were, unbeknownst to themselves, potentially exposed to the deadly pathogen. This likely helped spread COVID-19 across the country and maybe even internationally as airline workers, emergency crews and travelers continued with their business unknowingly infected with the virus.

Garland is northeast of Dallas, which, along with Las Vegas, have become epicenters of the virus in the United States. In Dallas County COVID-19 is the third leading cause of mortality and was already in that place as of the day of the woman's death. Dallas County has seen 90,790 cases to date with 1,205 deaths. By July 24, Clark County, which contains Las Vegas, had recorded 676 coronavirus deaths. The total now stands at 1,487 deaths, with 76,244 cases to date.

According to Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) numbers on July 24 there was a traveler throughput of 724,770 people, which is about 27 percent of last year's numbers for the same day. Airlines started to reopen domestic flights in April and

have expanded the number of flights regardless of the deadly pandemic and the obvious role that flights have in spreading the disease, in an effort to make profit.

The TSA has reported 263 employees with active COVID-19 infections, and a cumulative case total of 2,187 cases and 8 deaths.

Passenger Name Records (PNR), which are kept by airlines and required by the TSA, contain personal information on each and every person on the flight. This data is retained for six months in full with names, after which the data is supposedly made anonymous with exception of cases relating to "national security." This means that everyone on the flight could easily be traced and notified on the basis of information provided by either the TSA or Spirit Airlines, as this data includes phone numbers, emails and names all used for booking flights. It is not known as of this time if those affected on the flight have been notified.

While tens of thousands of airline workers have been laid off after airlines received a \$25 billion bailout through the CARES Act, those who remain have been subjected to deadly working conditions and forced to work in the middle of a pandemic which has claimed more than 225,000 lives in the United States.

By June at least ten Delta Air Lines workers had died and 500 became infected with COVID-19, according to an investors conference call that month. Nine days in April saw 15 COVID-19 related deaths across US airlines.

Passenger throughput actually increased in May and accelerated in June as the airlines put countless passengers and employees lives at risk for profit. By early July dozens of airline workers had died from the virus, many at some of the largest airports by traffic in the country. This included a baggage handler at Dallas-Fort Worth, a food services manager and a baggage

handler at JFK in New York, and a gate agent at LAX. In April, Delta Air Lines sent a memo instructing those who caught the virus to “refrain from notifying other crew members” or posting on social media.

Many airline workers were not notified of infections, with a Delta flight attendant telling the *World Socialist Web Site* in June that, “The airlines claim to inform employees if they have been exposed by other employees. What they don’t tell you, is that by the time you get the call, two weeks have already passed.” Another crew member told the WSWS that, “We have a flight attendant who recently passed, and we don’t know if it was related to COVID or not. When one worker dies, the company will send a condolence card, and another employee takes their place.”

On July 24 it was reported that a Los Angeles flight attendant for Hawaiian Airlines died of COVID-19 and sixteen of his colleagues were sick from the virus. On July 20 it was reported that two Anchorage-based Alaska Airlines customer service agents tested positive for the virus and two dozen of their colleagues had to be quarantined.

The question one is left with is how many could have been saved had a rational approach been taken, the woman on the Texas flight quickly tested and everyone affected quarantined? If proper safety measures had been taken and if there had been testing of all passengers?

The increasingly open embrace of herd immunity by the government and business at all levels has led to countless needless infections and deaths. There is no medical reason that prevented tracking the case and notifying employees and travelers, there are the tools to do it. The fact is that airlines, like businesses around the world, are absolutely hostile to the fundamental interests of the working masses and work to sweep the pandemic under the rug in the interests of producing profits.



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