

Number of infections among UPS airline pilots doubled in one month

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One hundred pilots for UPS Airlines were infected with coronavirus last month, double the amount for the rest of the year, the pilots' union announced on Nov. 30. The UPS Airlines division is based in Louisville, Kentucky, home of its massive Worldport facility. In addition to being the largest employer in Louisville with 25,000 employees, UPS has 3,000 pilots in the Independent Pilots Association (IPA) and 481,000 employees total worldwide.

The president of the IPA, Robert Travis, wrote a letter to UPS CEO Carol Tomé Oct. 29, concurring with management that the sharp increase in infections could possibly disrupt operations. But the IPA's toothless appeal for more testing of pilots was essentially ignored by UPS. International flight crews from hubs in Miami, Florida, Ontario, California and flight crews from all other domestic flights are not receiving any testing. Workers are also not receiving extra hazard pay in spite of the danger of infection.

UPS Worldport's Centennial hub was the site of an industrial accident on Nov. 18 which killed 28-year-old David A. Platt. The facility has been handling double the regular volume of packages throughout the pandemic.

UPS is one of the world's largest airlines, with 500 aircraft flying to over 220 countries, and Louisville, Kentucky, is its largest hub, with capacity of up to 500 flights per day from around the world, and the heart of its operations, because of its geographic position where a major portion of the population in North America is within reach. Another major hub for UPS Airlines is in Anchorage, Alaska, a critical base for its lucrative Asian shipping destinations.

At least 185 FedEx Express pilots have also tested positive for COVID-19 according to figures released Nov. 10 by the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA).

According to a report on Nov. 23 *Washington Post*, UPS has received six Abbott rapid-testing machines as part of government's Project Airbridge medical supply program. However, according to union officials only one machine in Anchorage, Alaska, was in use for pilots heading to Asia until recently.

UPS' share value has shot up over 71 percent since June. The logistics giant also reported \$2.4 billion in profits in the third quarter, up 11 percent from the same period last year.

Not to be outdone, shares for rival logistics company FedEx have jumped over 121 percent over the same time frame. The key driver for the bonanza for investors in both companies is the record surge in package volumes as more consumers make purchases online. According to a recent Bloomberg report, both UPS and FedEx are struggling even to purchase enough delivery vans to keep pace with rising demand.

The total number of infections and deaths at both companies is not publicly available, and both companies have largely dropped any regular reporting since the initial wave in the spring. However, at least two employees at Worldport had died as of early April, and a FedEx statement from September suggested that around 8,000 of its workers had been infected. Early in the pandemic, FedEx warehouse workers and delivery drivers complained of being forced to work without even minimal protections such as masks and gloves.

Both companies are strategically positioned to rake in even more profits through the distribution of the vaccine and other pandemic supplies. Tomé declared UPS is increasing its "freezer farm capacity by installing validated freezers that range from negative 20 to negative 80 degrees Celsius."

The Worldport facility will be utilized by UPS as a key distribution point for the coronavirus vaccine, and

has acquired 150 freezers that each can reach the ultra-cold storage temperature for up to 48,000 doses.



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