UPS Worldport facility begins distribution of vaccine

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On Sunday, shipments of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine began arriving at United Parcel Service's massive Worldport facility in Louisville, Kentucky, the first leg of the massive logistics operation to distribute the life-saving cure for COVID-19 to the United States' population.

The vaccine is being distributed to at least 636 locations throughout the country, according to Army General Gustave Perna, the Chief Operating Officer of President Donald Trump's Operation Warp Speed. Hundreds of doctor's offices, CVS and Walgreen's pharmacies throughout the United States received the vaccine on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. In addition to UPS, FedEx is also heavily involved in the movement of the vaccine to different locations in the US.

"The Vaccine is Here," proclaimed Louisville's WDRB.com News on Sunday. According to the website, "The doses are stored at -70 degrees Celsius until they are administered and cannot be refrozen. Dry ice will be used in the shipping and delivery process to ensure the doses remain at the proper temperature."

The two containers of the vaccine are affixed with tracking devices that ensure they are easily located at all times in the massive complex. Shots will be sent to various locations throughout the US with high population concentration. For security reasons, neither Pfizer nor the shipping companies moving the vaccine are announcing the total number of doses that are being provided.

The vaccine has arrived at peak holiday season in the United States. UPS's Worldport facility is the shipping giant's central hub for its air freight fleet. UPS employs over 12,000 workers in Louisville, mostly at Worldport, which handles over 300 flights on a daily basis. According to company spokespeople, the hub ships over 2 million packages an hour in off-peak times.

With the pandemic and the influx in demand for shipped goods, the location has been working at essentially peak capacity for the majority of 2020. "The busiest time's right before Christmas. We're going to be well beyond 4 million [packages in an hour]," said company spokesperson Jim Mayer of the growth in demand.

To handle the surge in demand, the corporation has hired over 100,000 seasonal employees nationwide, while also adding 39,000 permanent positions. It has expanded its weekend services to include both residential and commercial shipping to fully capture the market created by the pandemic.

Despite this, UPS is still falling behind in staffing at its massive Worldport hub. "One of Louisville's largest employers is still looking to fill 1,000 seasonal positions locally," NBC's local affiliate reported last month.

Both UPS and FedEx have profited handsomely throughout the pandemic. The massive logistical infrastructure overseen by the shipping giants has placed them in an advantageous position to capture the demand for both essential items as well as the newly-developed vaccine. "Vaccines might help to lift the companies' profits, and potentially. their stock prices," wrote Al Root in *Barron*'s.

He added: "But FedEx and UPS shares have had a good year so far, and vaccine distribution is a relatively minor factor compared with the explosion in e-commerce volume the pandemic has triggered." The two corporations' stock value has ballooned by 92 percent for FedEx and 44 percent for UPS. There are also ample opportunities for profit in "shipping things such as syringes and saline solution, as well as

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temperature-controlled packaging materials," notes the financial publication.

Despite the surge in stock profit, the average seasonal employee at UPS receives an average of $14.50 an hour for the essential work they carry out. The WSWS reported the death of 28-year-old David A. Platt at the Worldport facility last month. Platt was killed by blunt force injuries at the job site, the coroner said. In addition, at least two UPS workers died from COVID-19 in spring at the same facility.

The company is poorly managing its testing and contact tracing for viral infections among its workforce. According to the Independent Pilots' Association, which represents UPS's air freight workers, over 200 pilots contracted COVID-19 last month. This is double the number of infections from the entire year up to that point, IPA spokesman Brian Gaudet said.

"There are 380 flights in and out of Louisville every day. There is now testing available only for international pilots, but not inbound pilots who are coming in from flying from all points of America and the globe," said Gaudet to WFPL. This raises the likelihood that pilots are being forced to sacrifice themselves in order to ship the life-saving vaccine to America's essential workers, who are first in line to receive treatment.

"UPS doesn't really care [about the workers] until they absolutely need to," Anthony, a UPS worker in Baltimore, told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Speaking of his Baltimore location, he said, "In October we got forklifts to help with some high-volume Amazon stuff. The sad thing is we're not getting paid anything more for it."

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