COVID-19 spreads at Dana plants as company, unions force workers to stockpile parts

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The Delta variant is spreading through Dana plants across the US, putting workers' lives and the lives of their loved ones at risk, auto parts workers at Dana report. Although the contract for some 3,500 auto parts workers expired August 18 and workers rejected a proposed tentative agreement by 90 percent, the USW and UAW have forced workers to continue working—including mandatory overtime—to help the company stockpile parts in preparation for a strike. As a result, the plants are becoming centers for the spread of the pandemic.

The WSWS contacted Dana's Office of Safety as well as spokespersons for the UAW and USW to request specific numbers and received no response as of press time. A number of hospitals near Dana plants also said they could not provide information about the number of hospitalizations among workers. The following review is based on statements from local union officials, reports from workers and data from county health departments.

Dry Ridge, Kentucky

The most serious outbreak appears to be at Dana's plant in Dry Ridge. Multiple workers report that a large proportion of the plant's workforce of around 800 is currently out due to covid. Ex-Dana worker Steven Fletcher says he was fired from Dana Dry Ridge after missing time due to COVID earlier this year.

Warren, Michigan

There are currently 9 active cases at the plant in Warren, Michigan, according to an update from the company dated September 9. The company claims there were 53 confirmed positive cases in 2020, but already 114 this year. At least one worker at the plant has died from COVID in 2021. It appears that coronavirus has spread in the Warren plant nearly four times faster than in the surrounding city of Warren, a large suburb of Detroit. This year has seen 7,312 total cases in the city, equal to 5.42 percent of Warren's population, according to the county COVID dashboard. By contrast, at the Dana plant, which is believed to have a workforce of roughly 600, the 114 reported cases in 2021 would amount to around 19 percent of the plant's typical workforce. This is up sharply from last year, when the percentages for Warren and the Dana plant were roughly 5 and 8.8 percent, respectively.

Incredibly, workers report that Dana and the UAW are sending a team of workers from Warren to the Dry Ridge plant to help fill orders. The plant in Columbia, Missouri, is also reportedly sending a group of workers to Dry Ridge. There is a substantial risk that they will get infected in Dry Ridge and then bring the virus back to their coworkers.

Crossville, Tennessee

It appears there is also an outbreak at Dana's Crossville, Tennessee, plant. A USW notice published September 10 said that due to COVID infections, "we had to delay the vote at the Crossville Local." However, while the vote was postponed, the union kept production going.

Fort Wayne, Indiana

An individual with detailed knowledge told the WSWS that "COVID is spreading" in the Fort Wayne plant. Two of the individuals with whom this source works are presently sick with COVID. In a separate department of the plant, one worker says there are 5 confirmed positive cases. Other workers at the plant report that they have asked for exact numbers, but that the USW and company have not told them. Workers say the company sprayed them with fungicide at Fort Wayne earlier this year and forced them to keep working when there were reports of positive cases.

Paris, Tennessee

A worker at the Paris plant reports that at least two workers in their department are currently sick with COVID and that recently, an entire

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shift of maintenance department workers tested positive. Another person with knowledge of conditions at the Paris plant told the WSWS, "I don't know the exact number of active cases. The company makes a point of keeping cases as quiet as possible. I know for sure there have been 2 deaths, but I *think* there was a third. Many others have caught COVID that turned into pneumonia which made recovery even more difficult."

Danville, Kentucky

One worker at the Danville plant reports five workers in their department are presently sick with COVID. According to a company notice, 8 workers at the plant out of a workforce of 300 are currently out for confirmed cases.

Lima, Ohio

A worker reports that there have been at least 5 or 6 recent cases in their department and that the company did not clean any of the equipment after the workers tested positive. Another worker in Lima, Ohio, said, "We would never know [about active COVID cases], it's not like they clean or care anyways."

Workers at other plants were unable to confirm the total case number because they say the company and unions are not reporting the numbers.

A worker in Toledo, Ohio, told the WSWS: "We have had employees who have tested positive been told not to tell others as they can't afford for a whole line to call off on a COVID leave. I've had people gone for days on my line thinking they were on vacation and hear later that they had COVID. This is the normal at our Dana plant. I worked next to my team lead every day who tested positive, I didn't know until 3 days after she had been gone. I thought she was on vacation."

An Auburn Hills, Michigan, worker says, "They don't notify us by text like they used to. Our own safety guy isn't vaccinated so its hard to take him serious."

Case data from local government organizations reveals that in every county where a Dana plant is located, COVID cases are on the rise substantially.

Cases are at an all-time peak in Dry Ridge, Henderson, Louisville and Danville, Kentucky, as well as Paris, Humboldt, and Crossville, Tennessee. Cases are increasing rapidly in Lima and Toledo, Ohio; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Columbia, Missouri; Pottstown, Pennsylvania and Warren, St. Clair and Auburn Hills, Michigan.

If workers get sick, it is more likely than ever that they will not be able to be treated in the hospital. The hospitals in Paris, Crossville and Danville have no ICU beds available, according to public reporting. In Fort Wayne, Indiana, the only two hospitals with public data are 99 and 97 percent full. In Maumee, Ohio, there is only one bed remaining at St. Luke's hospital located on the same highway exit as Dana's world corporate headquarters.

The shortage of beds is particularly acute in Kentucky and Tennessee, where nine of Dana's 21 US plants are located and which are currently experiencing some of their worst-ever surges. For seven of these nine facilities, ICU bed utilization within a 30-mile radius of the plant's physical address is above the national average of 81.82 percent, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services. For the Louisville plant, according to the latest government figures, ICU utilization is 110 percent. For three plants—Danville, Kentucky; Gordonsville, Tennessee; and Crossville, Tennessee—there are fewer than 10 available ICU beds within a 30 mile radius.

By keeping the plants open, Dana and the UAW are not only placing workers' own lives at risk, but also the lives of their spouses, children, elderly parents and the community at large. The Delta variant has proven capable of killing healthy children or giving them lingering effects, including impairment of brain function. If the virus is already in Dana's plants, that means it is likely spreading in the schools, grocery stores, the restaurants and everywhere else.

Indeed, manufacturing plants, next to schools, are known to be key drivers of community transmission. At the beginning of the pandemic, major outbreaks in rural counties throughout the country were highly correlated with outbreaks at meatpacking plants, which management, with the support of an executive order by the Trump administration, kept open in spite of mass infections.

Efforts to "mitigate" the spread of the pandemic—including through mask wearing and vaccination—are not enough to stop the spread. As long as the plants are open, the virus will spread.

The Delta variant spreads indoors even with mask wearing, and "breakthrough" cases of vaccinated people are more common. The plants are poorly ventilated, without adequate air conditioning, meaning particles sit in the air and spread to every production line and every part of the plant.

The policy of the US government and the corporations is to kill workers for profit. Right now, the governors of all states where Dana plants are located—whether Democrats or Republicans—are opening up schools and forcing workers' children as well as teachers to risk their lives so workers can go to work to be exploited for profit.

As a result, 660,000 people have died in the US. Every day, twice as many people die of COVID in the US (roughly 1,000) than soldiers on both sides died on an average day during the Civil War (roughly 500). All over the world it is the same, and over four million people are dead. Meanwhile, corporate profits and the stock market are reaching new records, while the billionaires enrich themselves through pandemic profiteering.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and *Autoworker Newsletter* call for the **immediate shutdown of all Dana plants, with full quarantine pay for every worker! Workers must not be forced to choose between infection and eviction**.

Dana CEO James Kamsickas' 2020 salary alone ($10.5 million) is enough to provide every Dana worker with $3,000 immediately to cover costs during quarantine. Add to this the $14 million in quarterly dividend payments Dana pays out—which it resumed in March after suspending it in 2020 due to the pandemic—as well as its $7.3 billion in total assets, and there is more than enough money to pay workers full time for the weeks required to control the spread.

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