

# COVID-19 continues to spread in Dana auto parts plants and surrounding communities

Our reporters

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More than a year and a half into the pandemic, COVID-19 is continuing to run rampant throughout auto parts plants run by Dana Incorporated, a Fortune 500 company and one of the world's largest automotive suppliers.

As has been the case throughout the auto industry, workers at Dana have been kept almost entirely in the dark about the extent of COVID-19 cases and deaths at their facilities, turning every workday into a gamble with a potentially deadly virus.

In the rare cases where the company has released limited information, such as at Dana's Warren, Michigan, plant, they have provided a grim glimpse into the extent of COVID's spread. According to the latest totals released to workers at the Warren plant, 167 people, out of a total workforce of approximately 600, have fallen ill with COVID-19 at some point during the pandemic, including 114 in 2021 alone. The proportion infected has been nearly three times higher than in Warren more broadly, confirming once again that workplaces have been transmission belts for infection.

The trade unions which claim to "represent" Dana workers—the United Autoworkers and the United Steelworkers—have predictably joined with the company in depriving workers of information, in line with their blackout of cases and deaths in the auto and steel industries more broadly.

The Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee, initiated by workers last month to oppose the demands for concessions pushed by company and the UAW and USW, issued a statement on September 13 calling for immediate measures to halt the out-of-control spread of the virus. The statement demands a shutdown of Dana's plants combined with full pay for all those affected, in order to save lives and prevent COVID from afflicting further harm on workers and their families.

Tennessee and Kentucky, where Dana has eight plants, have been suffering horrific surges of the Delta variant of the coronavirus in recent weeks, with some of the largest uncontrolled outbreaks not just in the United States, but *globally*.

The two states have the second- and fourth-highest number of daily new cases per capita in the US, respectively. Daily new cases and hospitalizations have neared or even exceeded their records set previously in the pandemic, with deaths continuing to spiral upwards.

## Kentucky

Dana's facility in **Dry Ridge**, Kentucky, located in Grant County, is a hotspot for the spread of the virus. Grant County has a daily new case rate of 124 per 100,000 and test positivity rate of 14 percent, indicating uncontrolled community transmission.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently reported that there are four workers currently hospitalized, with one worker on a ventilator fighting for his life. Workers have reported that there are dozens of active cases among those employed there.

To keep production going at the plant in spite of the outbreak, Dana has been sending teams of workers from out of state in order to make up production shortfalls, risking the possibility that the virus will be brought back to other factories when workers return, further fueling its spread.

In **Louisville**, located in Jefferson County and Kentucky's largest city, cases are surging. At Dana's plant there, the company and the union refuse to inform workers about cases inside the facility. "They don't like to tell us, so we never really know," a worker commented.

Boyle County, Kentucky is the site of Dana's **Danville** plant. A worker there told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I think eight or nine [workers] are currently out, but that's just this month. There were as many, if not more, last month."

At Dana's facility in **Henderson**, Kentucky, workers go unpaid for missing work due to quarantining, they say.

## Tennessee

Dana's plant in **Paris**, Tennessee is located in rural Henry County, roughly two hours west of Nashville. According to one former worker there, "The company makes a point of keeping cases as quiet as possible," adding, "I know for sure there have been two deaths, and I think a third."

Smith County, where Dana's **Gordonsville**, Tennessee facility is located, is experiencing its worst outbreak of COVID-19 so far in the pandemic, with an astonishing 28 percent test positivity rate. According to the website *Education Week*, Gordonsville has lost at least one educator to the virus, Tracy Alexander, aged 57.

Dana also has facilities in **Humboldt** and **Crossville**, Tennessee. It is unclear as of this writing what the extent of the virus is inside these plants.

## Fort Wayne, Indiana

## Columbia, Missouri

A worker at the Columbia, Missouri, Dana plant said they have been given no information about the number of cases in their workplace by either the company or the UAW. However, he said that as many as 15-20 workers were out sick with COVID-19 at one time, based on what workers had reported to each other. Until recently, the company provided little to no financial support to workers who needed to quarantine, he added.

As workplaces reopened after limited shutdowns, he said, “a lot of people didn’t want to go back into a factory, and I don’t blame them. You’ve got to pay the bills, but you’ve also to care of yourself and your family. You go into work, and you pray you don’t take it [COVID-19] back home.”

In Boone County, where Columbia is located, new daily reported cases have increased 85 percent compared to two weeks ago. Daily cases are being reported at a per capita rate of 35 per 100,000, and the test positivity rate is running at 11 percent.

The seven-day average of daily cases in Boone County is now running even higher than during the earlier surge of the Delta variant over the summer which ravaged Missouri.

The return to in-person school at the University of Missouri, which is located in Columbia, has undoubtedly contributed to continuing high rate of transmission in the area. Over 3,100 cases have been reported in connection with the university since the start of the pandemic, equal to roughly 10 percent of the 2021 enrolled student population.

“You’re looking at a whole ton of 18-year-old kids coming from all around the country,” the worker added. “You’re going to have thousands and thousands of college kids coming from out of state, or from places that didn’t have as many mask and other requirements as we had here.”

## Lima, Ohio

While it has been difficult to determine the extent of the spread within the Lima plant, workers have described conditions in which masking is often not enforced and frequently used machinery is never cleaned. The surrounding area has also experienced a surge of COVID-19 over the summer and into September.

According to the Ohio Department of Health, there have been 612 COVID-19 cases and 25 hospitalizations in Allen County, where Lima is located, since the start of September. The spread of the virus also prompted the Lima City Council to pass a resolution for the establishment of a quarantine and isolation facility for infected homeless people.

At the Fort Wayne, Indiana, plant workers reported five known cases, while saying that it could be likely higher. “Shop stewards and team leaders have been tested positive multiple times but the area is rarely ever cleaned,” a worker said. One worker described their COVID experience: “I had a migraine, couldn’t smell or eat anything. I was in the plant for the first two days thinking I had a sinus infection. Come to realize I had COVID-19 and the line or other areas of the plant I was in was never cleaned.”

The Indiana Department of Health reported 3,580 new positive COVID cases from September 7–13, and hospitalizations have increased 17 percent over the last two weeks. Since March 2020 there have been 925,698 cases with 15,046 deaths in the state.

In Allen County where the Fort Wayne plant is located, there have been **52,539** cases since the beginning of the pandemic. St. Joseph Hospital in Fort Wayne is currently at 100 percent ICU capacity.

Another worker responded to the spread of COVID-19 in the plant, saying, “I read the article on the bombing of the area [with fungicide]. Workers need to be educated on this. People are afraid to speak up when infected. There’s a vague attendance policy. They don’t want to get in trouble.

“I agree with workers fighting against this. Like the contract, COVID is never discussed by the union. It wasn’t in the contract. There’s never a shutdown because the financial people are taken care of. People like us are back in the plant and could be super spreaders. There were people in here early on that had COVID and almost died and are back now. They could tell you why it’s necessary for us to shut down and get the vaccine.”

*The World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter encourages workers to share information about the impact of COVID-19 on themselves and their workplaces. We will protect your anonymity and sources will be kept confidential. Contact us today.*



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