

Workers reveal COVID-19 infections at Australia Post

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
19 January 2022

The current surge of COVID-19 in Australia is having a devastating effect on workers. Throughout transport, warehousing and manufacturing, masses of workers are becoming infected with the deadly virus. Australia Post is no exception.

The Communications, Electrical and Plumbers' Union (CEPU) is doing everything it can to keep this quiet to prevent posties from seeing the true extent of the crisis and recognising the growing danger they confront each day at work. This is because the union bureaucracy is in complete agreement with the demands of management that there must be no disruption to "business (and profits) as usual."

In opposition to the silence of the union and management on what is literally a life or death question, the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) is working to collect and share reports from postal workers about COVID-19 outbreaks in their facilities.

One worker, a parcel delivery driver in southwest Sydney, said: "I got infected with COVID, even though I have had my third (booster) vaccination and was wearing an N95 mask.

"The week before I tested positive, four drivers in my team were out sick or were covering for sick workers in other areas. This left me and one other driver to cover an area three times larger than before.

"Management and the unions don't announce how many staff are away because of COVID. We don't get a full picture of what is happening in the facility. I only found out I had been exposed at the end of the weekend when another person in my team sent me a text notifying me he was positive for COVID.

"My son caught COVID from me. He was due to receive his first vaccination the day after I tested

positive. It was only by sheer luck that my wife, daughter and in-laws did not get infected as well.

"The first four days I had fever, headaches, a runny nose and was so tired I slept for about four hours during the day.

"Where I work some people aren't vaccinated at all and wear poor-quality cloth masks or surgical masks, often incorrectly fitted. I don't blame them; the problem is the confusion created by governments and the media, who say Omicron is mild, and will become endemic.

"Endemic doesn't mean not dangerous. Smallpox was endemic for thousands of years and killed countless people until a cure was found. Malaria is endemic and still kills a lot of people around the world.

"I think the policy of letting the virus rip and forcing workers to go back when they are asymptomatic is very dangerous for the working class and should be opposed."

A worker from another facility said: "Management at Australia Post has used the low bar and shifting of the goal posts by governments to erode the few in-house precautions against contracting COVID and now Omicron.

"The new benchmark of four hours to count as a close contact means that there will rarely be a situation where posties are required to isolate. Although we work within a few metres of each other in facilities that are crowded with workers, parcels and machinery, most posties spend less than four hours putting up their beats before they deliver.

"The union is notable for its silence. The latest union magazine says virtually nothing about the health crisis. Inside the facilities and when delivering to shopping malls, medical facilities and houses, we are constantly in close contact with different people. Workers and

customers are at risk in these interactions.

“At the outset of the pandemic, the union ensured that postal workers fell under the category of ‘essential workers’ and therefore had to work while others isolated. The union has yet to explain how delivering letters that could be emailed or junk mail that goes straight in the bin is an ‘essential’ service.

“More and more we have become a parcel delivery service as a consequence of a boom in online shopping, but it isn’t food or medical packages we are delivering, it is just stuff.

“I agree with the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee statement opposing the let it rip, live with death, profit-driven agenda of the government.”

A third worker stated: “Since the government removed the restrictions the situation has steadily deteriorated at our facility. Last week I heard there were 20 workers off with COVID and another 15 who were waiting for test results. That is at least a quarter of the staff.

“Management have told us that if we get a positive test result and have to take time off, we have to use our regular sick leave and won’t get paid pandemic leave until it is used up.

“There is a lot of anger with the government for getting rid of the restrictions and deliberately allowing the virus to rip through the work force.

“When the New South Wales government removed the mask mandate, Australia Post followed suit and a lot of people took their masks off. This took place right at the time the surge of Omicron cases started. A lot of people must have picked up the virus then as it is airborne and very infectious. Now with the numbers so high and a lot of workers getting sick, they’ve had to reinstate the mask mandate.

“We still have to use the QR code system at work and I am always getting notices from the Service NSW app that I have been in contact with the virus.

“But we are not being properly informed of infections in the facility; it’s just ‘keep going, nothing to see here.’ This is what they mean by ‘living with the virus.’

“The union has said nothing, it’s like they don’t exist. They agree with this policy and the fact they have said nothing means they are complicit. They know there is growing anger and I think they will do everything in their power to stop workers taking any

action against this disaster we confront.

“The union says they support the ‘health advice’ from the government as they have always done. But the advice is to let the virus rip, let workers get sick and spread the virus to their coworkers and families.

“With their complicity, the union is proving the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee correct. We can only defend our basic interests, including to health and safety, by organising independently. We need to be able to discuss the situation we face, free from management and union interference, link up workers from facilities across the country, share information, and plan what action needs to be carried out, including possibly strikes, to protect our health and lives.”

The PWRFC urges all Australia Post and other delivery workers to contact us to report workplace infections and share their experiences.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact