

Virtual Press Packet: COVID-19 Protections for Nebraska workers, families, communities, food production

Nebraska Workers' Stories

"[JBS] supervisors are telling people that even if they are positive they can go to work, to keep it on the DL. And to not say anything or they will get fired. An employee [said] her father works there and he was positive and they told him to come to work. They say it is nothing serious as long as they get checked with the nurse when they come to work they are fine." - **Nebraska Worker**

"I have been working for 20 years. My wife and I made the decision that at this time of the pandemic, she will stay home with the boys. Our income will be lower, but our family is the priority. At home, we are all stressed. A coworker called me and said: "get tested, I tested positive and the only place I go is work." I went to the doctor and I am awaiting the results. My children ask: "Dad, did the doctor give you the results?" and I answer them, "stay calm, everything will be fine."

Although the company has taken some measures, with the way the work area is structured, it is difficult to keep our distance. There are many jobs where employees are working very closely and that closeness is what can infect us. I'm still afraid to go to work, for me and my family. Now there are quite a few employees who have the virus. At this time, going to work is a risk that we are facing every day." - **Nebraska Worker** [Note: We are very sorry to report this person has now tested positive for COVID-19.]

"I was talking to [X] today and she said the working situation at JBS only 'improved' for about a week. After that week it went back to normal (no soap in the dispenser, no antibacterial hand sanitizers, toilets over flooding in the bathroom). She says they work 3 feet apart from each other and the only reason there was more than 3 feet at times was because people were out sick. She said they advise to keep a 6ft distance while at lunch but everyone is in a hurry to get their lunch and back since they don't get a very long break that everyone seems to be bunched up together. She also advises, people KNOW what's going on, they know it's dangerous to go to work, but they also know their families won't eat if they don't show up." - **Nebraska Worker**

"Despite our efforts beginning weeks ago, many of our own parents have tested positive for COVID-19 and or have been sent home because they have been in contact with another worker

who previously tested positive, my dad included. We couldn't protect our parents from their working conditions, but we continue to advocate to do something to protect all workers.

While every other sector of our community including schools and small businesses implemented health and safety measures and did just about everything in their power to prevent the spread, we did not see the same leadership from Smithfield.

Many of our parents have given 10, 15, 20, and 25 years of service to the company, proving their loyalty and their continued desire to provide for their families. What we ask for in return is responsibility, transparency, and protection for our workers and our community.” - ***A family member of a Nebraska Worker***

Interview Request Contact Information

Statewide and National Coverage

Growing numbers of plants and states experiencing outbreaks and having to suspend food production:

- [As they rushed to maintain U.S. meat supply, big processors saw plants become covid-19 hot spots, worker illnesses spike](#) (Washington Post, 4.28.20)
- [Smithfield plant in Crete now says it will stay open; workers briefly walk out in protest](#), (Omaha World Herald, 4.28.20)
- [Ranks of Absent U.S. Food Inspectors Swell on Virus, Union Says](#) (Bloomberg 4.24.20)
- [Coronavirus at meat packing plants worse than first thought. USA TODAY investigation finds](#) (USA Today, 4.22.20)
- [OWH Editorial: Pause packing plant operations to boost their virus protection](#) (Omaha World-Herald, 4.21.20)
- [Meatpacking plants are Nebraska's newest battleground in war against coronavirus](#) (Omaha World-Herald, 4.21.20)
- [More Nebraska meatpacking plants report COVID-19 cases](#) (Lincoln Journal Star, Lexington, Madison, Dakota City, 4.20.2020)
- [Coronavirus cases in Lexington area have more than doubled in a week](#) (Lexington, Nebraska, Tyson, 4.19.20)
- [The Food Chain's Weakest Link: Slaughterhouses; some have closed because workers are getting sick](#) (New York Times, 4.18.20)
- [Coronavirus cases spike in Dakota County; some are Tyson plant workers](#) (South Sioux City, Nebraska, 4.17.20)
- [Rochelle's Hormel Foods plant ordered to close after 24 cases of COVID-19 are linked to facility](#) (Illinois, 4.17.20)
- [South Dakota pork plant now worst COVID-19 hotspot in U.S., over 600 cases now linked to the plant](#) (4.15.20)

- [JBS meat plant in Greeley to shut down, employees concerned about 'lack of communication'](#) (Colorado, 4.13.20)
- [Dozens of Tri-Citians sick with coronavirus from outbreak linked to beef plant](#) (Tyson, Washington state, 4.13.20)
- [One of the largest pork processing facilities in the US is closing until further notice](#) (CNN 4.13.20)
- [10 workers at Hastings meatpacking plant, 1 worker at Fremont chicken plant have COVID-19](#) (OWH 4.13.20)
- [238 COVID-19 cases now traced to SD meatpacking plant](#) (4.11.20)
- [Poultry Worker's Death Highlights Spread of Coronavirus in Meat Plants](#) (NYTimes 4.9.20)
- [Smithfield responds to increasing COVID-19 cases at Sioux Falls plant - 80 cases](#)
- [COVID-19 concerns reported at Greeley's JBS meat plant; county health department opens investigation](#) (Colorado)
- [Poultry processor sends 415 Georgia employees home with pay; 2 poultry worker deaths](#)
- [Three meat plants shut in Iowa and Pennsylvania as coronavirus outbreak spreads](#) (2 Iowa plants)
- [Cargill shuts US meat plant due to COVID-19](#) (Pennsylvania)
- [Bloomberg: Tyson, JBS closures show virus hitting American meat production](#)
- [COVID-19 outbreak halts production at Tyson pork processing plant in Iowa](#)
- [Map](#) of plant outbreaks and closures