

Amazon ordered to temporarily close facility near Toronto due to increase in COVID-19 cases

A public health authority has ordered Amazon to close one of its fulfillment centers in Canada for two weeks because of an uptick in the rate of COVID-19 infections at the facility. A public health investigation found that while the rate of COVID-19 infections has been decreasing in the area, the rate inside the Brampton facility, near Toronto, "has been increasing significantly."

Dr. Lawrence C. Loh, the medical officer of health for the Peel region where the facility is located, said the temporary closure was necessary to help stop the spread of the virus. "This Amazon facility is in a vulnerable community and employs thousands of people. Immediate action must be taken to protect these essential workers and the community where they live," Loh said in a statement.

In an email to The Verge on Saturday, Amazon spokesperson Dave Bauer said the company doesn't believe the data supports the closure, and that it plans to appeal the decision. Bauer says Amazon has required regular testing of employees at the Brampton plant, and the most recent round of tests found "little risk of spread" within the facility.

"Nothing's more important than the health and safety of our employees and the communities we serve," Bauer said in the email. "This closure may have some short-term impact on our Canadian customers, but we will work to recover as quickly as

possible.”

Employees at the Brampton facility are required to self-isolate until March 27th under the order, unless they tested positive for the virus in the past 90 days and have already self-quarantined.

Last March, Kentucky’s governor ordered an Amazon warehouse in that state closed following an outbreak, and Amazon temporarily closed one of its warehouses in New Jersey back in December.

However, throughout the coronavirus pandemic Amazon has continued to operate most of its warehouses and other facilities even when there were outbreaks of the virus. More than 19,000 of its front line workers had tested positive for the virus as of October, according to Amazon’s own figures, and workers have complained they often learned about outbreaks at their workplaces from external sources, not from the company directly.

Update March 13th, 12:47PM ET: Added statement from Amazon spokesperson

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