

Go read this story about Amazon workers fighting the company's robotic HR response to COVID

NBC News has published a great report on the struggles Amazon employees face trying to get tested for COVID after the company stopped onsite testing last summer, and the HR quagmire they could end up in when reporting their results or dealing with illness-related PTO. The story is well worth a read, as it delves into Amazon's policies and systems, and gives a voice to the employees they affect.

The author of the report spoke to workers who faced breakthrough cases and unexpected costs as they tried to get tested for COVID, struggling with an overburdened and difficult-to-navigate healthcare system. "I really wish they would bring free COVID testing back to us," says one employee.

One employee says Amazon's systems "take the human out of human resources"

The story also shows the problems they could face if they test positive, or start developing symptoms. Amazon's workers are supposed to get 40 hours of paid leave after a positive test or exposure, according to an updated Amazon policy. But many of those that spoke to NBC reported that they ran into difficulties or errors trying to get time off. One worker said that the company's "self-service kind of H.R. system" seemed designed to "to kind of take the human out of human resources." That system has faced criticism in the past for everything from underpaying employees to mistakenly firing them.

But if the system is robotic, it seems to have broken down – workers told NBC News that they found it nearly impossible to get help if they test positive, and talked about systems improperly marking them as having use paid time off.

Trying to contact an actual human isn't much better. One employee quoted in the report talked about how the company's phone lines were swamped: "I could not reach a live person no matter how hard I tried." She ended up speaking to someone in person about how she needed to get tested after finding out one of her close co-workers had COVID. A contractor that works at Amazon's COVID-19 hotline told NBC News there were 1,700 calls on hold at one point.

The company told NBC that it was looking into reports of the time-off issues, and that it offers incentives and events to help employees get vaccinated.

If you're interested in the saga of how Amazon manages the health of its massive workforce, the report is absolutely worth a read. It provides some great insight into the results of Amazon's workplace protection policies, which have sparked employee protests and legal pressure in some cases. Even if you're not interested in Amazon specifically, you'll probably get something out of reading the words of the employees having to deal with these systems while also making sure Amazon's packages keep moving.

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