

Nearly 59,000 meatpacking workers caught COVID, while 269 died

October 28 2021



(HealthDay)—The number of U.S. meatpacking workers who were

infected during the COVID-19 pandemic is nearly three times higher than previously thought, a U.S. House report shows.

It said at least 59,000 workers caught the disease and 269 died as the [pandemic](#) raged through the industry last year, and added that companies could have done more to protect their employees, the *Associated Press* reported. Because workers stand shoulder-to-shoulder in [production lines](#), the meatpacking industry was one of the early epicenters of the coronavirus pandemic. During the height of the outbreaks in the spring of 2020, U.S. meatpacking production fell to about 60% of normal as several major plants were forced to close for deep cleaning and safety upgrades, or operated at slower speeds because of [worker](#) shortages.

Previously, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union said 22,400 meatpacking workers were infected or exposed.

The new estimates are based on internal documents from five of the nation's largest meatpacking companies: JBS, Tyson Foods, Smithfield Foods, Cargill and National Beef.

The actual number of affected workers could be higher than the [figures](#) from the U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis because coronavirus cases confirmed by outside testing or self-reported by employees were not generally included in the companies' data, the *AP* reported.

"Instead of addressing the clear indications that workers were contracting the coronavirus at alarming rates due to conditions in meatpacking facilities, meatpacking companies prioritized profits and production over worker safety, continuing to employ practices that led to crowded facilities in which the virus spread easily," according to the House report.

"Some of these companies are treating the workers in the plants not much better than the animals that go through them," and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration needs to do more to protect meatpacking workers, Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin said, the *AP* reported.

The industry's response to the pandemic was defended by the North American Meat Institute trade group.

And Cargill, Tyson, Smithfield and JBS issued statements saying they strove to meet federal health and safety standards and took further steps to protect their employees, including widespread testing and urging employees to get vaccinated, the *AP* reported.

More information: Visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more on [COVID-19](#).

Copyright © 2021 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: Nearly 59,000 meatpacking workers caught COVID, while 269 died (2021, October 28) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-meatpacking-workers-caught-covid-died.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--