

Over 75,000 Kaiser Permanente union workers go on strike

October 4 2023, by Robin Foster



Health care workers who serve millions of Americans began a three-day

strike on Wednesday after contract negotiations over staffing levels stalled.

More than 75,000 members of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions began walking off their jobs as early as 6 a.m. in Virginia and Washington, D.C., the Washington Post reported. The union, whose contract expired Saturday, represents medical assistants, surgical and lab technicians and pharmacists, among other staffers.

Workers and the nation's largest nonprofit, private health care provider failed to reach an agreement over the weekend. Along with staffing levels, pay and benefits are an issue, CNBC reported.

Paula Coleman, a 10-year clinical lab assistant who oversees blood and urine testing for Kaiser in Englewood, Colo., and plans to strike, said low staffing levels in her lab jeopardize [patient care](#). Coleman, often the only person working in her lab in the early mornings, fears she would not have backup if an emergency struck while she was drawing a patient's blood.

"We feel the absence of our co-workers every day," Coleman told the Post. "This could be someone's mother, sister, brother or daughter. This is about [patient safety](#)."

The strike will target Kaiser hospitals and medical offices in California, Colorado, Oregon, Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Washington state. Employees in Kaiser's Georgia facilities would not be affected. Kaiser Permanente serves nearly 13 million patients and operates 39 hospitals and more than 600 medical offices across the United States.

Caroline Lucas, executive director of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions, said staffing shortages have made working conditions unsafe and have led to deteriorating care for patients.

"We continue to have front-line [health care workers](#) who are burnt out and stretched to the max and leaving the industry," Lucas told CNBC. "We have folks getting injured on the job because they're trying to do too much and see too many people and work too quickly. It's not a sustainable situation."

Meanwhile, Kaiser has said that it has contingency plans to ensure continued patient care, CNBC reported.

The company is providing online [status reports](#), and has said it is confident negotiations will be successful.

Still, the coalition of unions has accused Kaiser of negotiating in bad faith and committing unfair labor practices, CNBC reported.

Kaiser generated \$25 billion in revenue in the [second quarter](#) of 2023. It reported \$2 billion in profit for the quarter, up from a loss of \$1.2 billion during same quarter in 2022, CNBC reported.

More information: The University of Southern California has more on [staffing shortages](#) in health care.

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