



Paid Sick Days Improve Our Public Health

When working people have no choice but to go to work sick, they risk infecting others.

- Nearly half (48%) of private-sector workers—57 million people—are not able to take a paid sick day when they are ill.¹
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that workers stay home from work when sick with common illnesses like the flu.² Workers without paid sick days don't have that option, and we all risk getting sick.

Workers who lack paid sick days are more likely to work in jobs requiring frequent contact with the public.

- More than three in four food service and hotel workers (78%) don't have a single paid sick day. Workers in child care centers, retail and nursing homes also overwhelmingly lack paid sick days.³

Nearly half of stomach “flu”-related outbreaks caused by the norovirus are linked to ill food-service workers—and they are among the least likely to have paid sick days.

- In 2008, when a worker at a Chipotle restaurant in Kent, Ohio had no choice but to come to work sick with the *norovirus*, over 500 people become violently ill. The outbreak cost the Kent community between \$130,233 and \$305,337. Each year, there are approximately 76 million cases of food-borne illness in the U.S.⁴
- The Food and Drug Administration now requires that workers with *norovirus*-related illnesses work on a restricted basis until 24 hours after symptoms subside.⁵ Since most food service operators don't offer paid sick time, workers are forced to be work sick or take unpaid leave.

Preventive care is critical for decreasing the number of avoidable hospitalizations, which in turn, reduces health care costs.

- People with chronic illnesses, such as asthma, hypertension and diabetes, may avoid hospitalization by managing their health through outpatient care.⁶ Paid sick days enable workers to take the time off they need for such preventative and diagnostic care.

Paid sick days enable working parents to care for their children when they are sick.

- Child care centers require sick children to stay home to prevent the spread of illness. And, the CDC recommends keeping children home from school for 24 hours after their fevers subside to prevent the spread of illnesses.⁷ Working parents with paid time off are five times more likely to stay home to care for their sick children than those without paid time off.⁸

When workers have paid sick days, they are able to make decisions to care for their own health and their family's health in a way that positively affects our public health.

- Currently, no state or federal law guarantees paid sick days—although paid sick days campaigns in a dozen states across the country are mobilizing in support of this basic workplace standard.
- Paid sick days legislation in Colorado would allow workers to earn up to nine paid sick days a year to recover from illness, care for a sick family member or attend medical appointments.

¹ Vicky Lovell, Institute for Women's Policy Research, *No Time to Be Sick*.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Taking Care of Yourself When You Have Seasonal Flu*, www.cdc.gov/flu/takingcare.htm.

³ Testimony of Heidi Hartmann, Institute for Women's Policy Research, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, 2007.

⁴ Policy Matters Ohio, *Outbreak in Ohio: Cost of the 2008 Norovirus Incident in Kent*, <http://www.policymattersohio.org/OutbreakInOhio2008.htm>.

⁵ Supplement to the 2005 FDA Food Code, www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fc05-sup.html#p2c1, October 5, 2007.

⁶ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, *Preventable Hospitalizations: Window Into Primary and Preventive Care*, 2000.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The Flu*, cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flu/gallery/2007-08/text/parents_guide_508.rtf.

⁸ J. Heymann, S. Toomey, and F. Furstenberg, "Working Parents: What Factors are Involved in Their Ability to Take Time Off From Work When Their Children are Sick?," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 153 (August 1999): 870-874.