



**NEW YORK STATE
PAID FAMILY LEAVE COALITION**

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NYC Suffers When Workers Lack Paid Sick Days

Every day New Yorkers are forced to choose between a paycheck and caring for their own health and/or a sick family member. Millions of New Yorkers do not have a single paid day off for illness a year. This lack of paid sick time comes with a cost -- not just to those workers, but also to their families, to businesses, to public health, to children and to seniors.

- In New York City, 65% of the working poor have no paid sick days.
- Only 39% of full time workers are permitted to use sick days for doctor visits.

THE LACK OF PAID SICK DAYS HURTS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. No parent should have to make a choice between caring for their sick child and a day's pay, but:

- Only 35% of full time employees with sick days are permitted to use them to care for a sick child.
- 49 percent of working mothers report that they must stay home when their children are sick, but half of them report that they must lose a day's pay in order to do so.

Despite the evidence that children fare better in school and recover faster from serious illnesses and medical emergencies if their parents can spend time helping them recuperate, the lack of paid sick days leaves parents in New York City with few options. Many are forced to send children to school sick, infecting other children and teachers.

Nearly two-thirds of Americans under the age of 60 expect to be responsible for the care of an elderly relative within the next ten years. Seventy percent of caregivers for elderly relatives work full time. When a caregiver cannot take time off, the elderly may have their health issues increase in severity due to neglect or be forced into short term nursing situations, at an average cost of \$158 per day.¹

A FUNDAMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURE

Sick workers can bring infectious diseases into the workplace. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that individuals who are ill “stay home from work and school” to prevent the spread of disease in the workplace and community.² Allowing workers with contagious diseases to avoid unnecessary contact with co-workers and customers is a fundamental public health measure.

Disproportionately sick workers employed in food service, nursing homes, child care centers, and the retail industry risk spreading contagion to the public. The risk of contagion increases when ill workers have high

¹ Lovell V. (2006). Valuing Good Health in San Francisco: The Costs and Benefits of a Proposed Paid Sick Days Policy. Institute for Women's Policy Research Report #B252.

² Centers for Disease Control website: www.cdc.gov

levels of contact with the public, yet for example only 4% of restaurant workers have paid sick days.³ Additionally sick workers are more likely to have an accident on the job.⁴ When workers can take needed time off without fear of being fired, the result is improved health outcomes, speedier recoveries for workers and their families, reduced total health-care spending and a decreased risk of the outbreak of a public health hazard.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR FAMILY RESPONSIVE POLICES

Paid sick days are not only responsive to the changing demographics of the American workplace, but also serve the enlightened self-interest of business. Paid sick days can actually enhance a business' bottom line. When workers are provided with paid sick time, they demonstrate increased job satisfaction, commitment, and morale, and their employers reap the benefits of high performance and productivity. Studies show that the productivity of workers with even minor illnesses goes down in comparison to the productivity of their healthy co-workers.⁵ The spread of contagion further compounds this loss of productivity.

Employees with paid sick days are less likely to leave their jobs.⁶ The costs of replacing workers are extremely high. Replacing a salaried worker typically costs 40% to 75% of the employee's annual salary. Recruitment involves a complex process that consumes valuable staff time with screening, interviewing, selection, and on-the-job training, for example the average employee replacement cost for an \$8 per hour worker exceeds \$5,500.⁷ If return on investment is ultimately the bottom line for businesses, then these examples show that investments in employees can produce attractive returns.

THE SOLUTION

The lack of paid sick days in New York City threatens the economic security of working families who cannot afford to lose a day's pay or risk loss of their job. It is important to adapt family-responsive policies like Paid Sick Days before the work-family conflicts experienced by an escalating number of Americans reach crisis level. New York City can and should pass a law requiring employers to provide paid sick time for their employees. Under their local home rule power the City Council of New York City has the authority to require employers in the City to provide paid sick days.

MOMENTUM AROUND THE COUNTRY

- San Francisco (in November, 2006) and Washington DC (in March, 2008) have passed laws requiring employers to provide employees with paid sick time
- Milwaukee and Wisconsin will have a ballot initiative on paid sick days in November 2008
- Alaska, California, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Vermont introduced paid sick days legislation this year

ELEMENTS OF POSSIBLE SICK DAYS LAW

- Will cover private and non-profit (not public) employees
- Accrual of hours of sick leave will be based on number of hours worked in a week
- All businesses will be covered, but small employers (less than 10 employees) may be required to provide fewer days
- Number of days could be 7-9 and fewer for small businesses
- Law would cover both worker's illnesses and time to care for sick family members and could cover domestic violence as Washington DC does

³Institute for Women's Policy Research Fact Sheet, February 2006. "Paid Sick Days Improve Public Health by Reducing the Spread of Disease."

⁴ Sorock, G.S., et al. (2004). "A case-crossover study of transient risk factors for occupational acute hand injury". *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. 61:305-311

⁵ Smith, A. (1989). "A Review of the Effects of Colds and Influenza on Human Performance." *Journal of the Society of Occupational Medicine*. 39: 65-68.

⁶ (Lovell V. (2005). *Valuing Good Health: An Estimate of Costs and Savings for the Healthy Families Act*. Washington D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research.)

⁷ Sasha Corporation, *Compilation of Turnover Cost Studies: \$8.00 per hour employee in the USA*.