



**NEW YORK STATE
PAID FAMILY LEAVE COALITION**

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Paid Sick Days are Fundamental for the Good of Public Health

Sick workers can bring infectious diseases into the workplace. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that workers who are ill “stay home from work” to prevent the spread of disease in the workplace and community.¹ A worker without paid sick days, choosing between going to work sick and staying home without pay, may have no rational choice but to ignore the CDC’s advice and take their germs to work. Allowing workers with contagious diseases to avoid unnecessary contact with co-workers and customers is a fundamental public health measure.

There is no question as to the public’s interest in limiting the spread of common diseases such as the flu, which causes tens of thousands of deaths every year. This risk increases when ill workers have high levels of contact with the public, especially those employed in food service, nursing homes, child care centers, and the retail industry. Despite this risk, workers whose jobs necessitate exposure to the public disproportionately lack paid sick days.

- Nationally, three of every four workers in the lowest wage quartile have jobs that do not provide paid sick days.² For example, only 4% of restaurant works have paid sick days.³
- In a New York City survey of restaurant workers, 57% earned wages below the poverty line, and 52% went to work when they were sick.⁴ Even the New York City Restaurant Manual, published by the Mayor’s Office, urges paid sick days, stating, “To allow a sick employee to continue to work handling food, endangers not only the employee’s health but the customers’ health as well. Employees who know they will forfeit wages by leaving work because of illness may hide the illness from the employer, thus putting everyone at risk.”⁵
- The CDC estimates that noroviruses, the pathogens associated with outbreaks, are actually more common in restaurants. In 2004, the most recent year for which data are available, there were 251 reported outbreaks of foodborne illnesses across the country involving nearly 10,000 victims.⁶

Paid sick days is a good policy which serves the public by limiting the spread of infectious illnesses such as the flu and food-borne diseases. 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.

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

2 <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B250.pdf>

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

4 <http://www.rocny.org/documents/ROC-NYExecSummary.pdf>

5 http://www.nyc.gov/html/dca/downloads/pdf/NYC_restaurant_guide.pdf

6 <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B250.pdf>