



the work and family legal center

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BACK-TO-SCHOOL FACT SHEET

Paid Sick Time and the Health of Your Children: What You Need to Know

Why Should School Parents Support Paid Sick Time Legislation?

- **Lack of Paid Sick Time is Widespread:** In 2010, approximately 44 million private sector workers in the United States lacked paid sick time.¹ Of those workers who do have paid sick time, many cannot take leave to care for an ill child.²
- **Lack of Paid Sick Time Endangers the Health of School-Age Children:** Parents who lack paid sick time are often faced with impossible choices; these workers cannot stay home to care for their ill children without losing pay or possibly risking their jobs. Children are more likely to miss doctors' appointments and go to school sick—infesting staff and other students—when their parents lack workplace flexibility and access to paid leave.³ Children with asthma and chronic diseases are especially vulnerable to missed health care appointments.⁴ Researchers have also reported anecdotal evidence that parents without paid sick time sometimes take older children out of school to provide care for a younger, ill sibling.⁵
- **Paid Sick Time Allows Parents to Provide Better Care to Their Children:** Access to paid leave is a primary factor in whether or not parents stay home with their sick children.⁶ For example, researchers studying San Francisco's paid sick days law determined that parents with knowledge of paid sick days coverage were significantly less likely to report sending a sick child to school.⁷ The benefits of parents having paid sick time are extremely significant for their children; research has shown that ill children have better vital signs, faster recoveries, and shorter hospital stays when cared for by their parents.⁸
- **Working Moms and Low-Wage Workers are Especially Burdened by the Lack of Paid Sick Time:** Although 80% of American mothers have primary responsibility within their families for taking children to medical appointments and arranging their health care, more than 50% of working mothers are unable to take off from work to care for a sick child.⁹ Low-wage workers are even less likely to have paid sick time. In New York City, for example, 65% of low-income public school parents lack paid sick time, as compared to 54% of all public school parents.¹⁰

But I Already Have Paid Sick Time. Why is Paid Sick Time Legislation Good for My Children and Community?

All families—even those who have access to paid sick time—benefit from laws that guarantee a minimum number of paid sick days for personal or family illness.

- **Paid Sick Time Reduces the Spread of Contagions in Schools and Communities:** Research has indicated that parents without paid sick time are more likely to send an ill child to school or day care.¹¹ Therefore, increased access to paid sick time will reduce the spread of illness in schools, day care centers, and throughout the community.
- **Take It From School Nurses! Paid Sick Time Improves Public Health:** School nurses have witnessed firsthand that paid sick time helps to minimize the spread of illness in schools.



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According to Mary Pappas, a New York City school nurse who detected the city's first cases of H1N1 (swine flu) in 2009, "[a]s any school nurse will tell you, one of the best defenses against contagious disease in our schools is making sure sick kids stay home where they won't infect their classmates . . . But for working parents without paid sick days, keeping their kids at home is not always possible."¹² The National Association of School Nurses has called paid sick time a legislative priority for 2011.¹³

- **Paid Sick Time Reduces Health Care Costs:** Paid sick time benefits the whole community by reducing health care costs. Due to a lack of paid sick time, many working parents have no choice but to take their sick children to the hospital after business hours; such unnecessary emergency room use burdens hospitals and raises health care costs.¹⁴ For example, 30% of low-income public school parents in New York City reported taking a child or family member to the emergency room due to their inability to take time off from work.¹⁵
- **The Success of San Francisco's Paid Sick Time Law:** In 2007, San Francisco implemented a law that provides paid sick time to workers in the city. Recent research confirms the policy's public health benefits and shows that two-thirds of San Francisco employers support the law.¹⁶

Please stand up for the health of your children and community's schools by supporting paid sick time legislation and sharing this information with other parents! For more information on the campaigns for paid sick time in New York City and throughout the country, please visit www.abetterbalance.org.

¹ Claudia Williams, Robert Drago & Kevin Miller, "44 Million U.S. Workers Lacked Paid Sick Days in 2010: 77 Percent of Food Service Workers Lacked Access," Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), Jan. 2011.

² Vicky Lovell, "No Time To Be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don't Have Paid Sick Leave," IWPR, May 2004, p. ii.

³ Letter from Katie Corrigan and Michael Teter to Department of Health and Human Services, Sept. 2, 2008 (on file with author), available at <http://workplaceflexibility2010.org/images/uploads/HP2020letter09-2-08-1.pdf> (summarizing findings by Jody Heymann, *The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families Are in Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It*. New York: Basic Books, 2000).

⁴ See Vicky Lovell, "A Prescription for Good Asthma Care for Children: Paid Sick Days for Milwaukee Parents," IWPR, Oct. 2008, p. 1.

⁵ Jeremy Reiss, Nancy Rankin & Krista Pietrangelo, "Sick in the City: What the Lack of Paid Leave Means for Working New Yorkers," A Better Balance and Community Service Society of New York, Oct. 2009, p. 12.

⁶ Heymann, *The Widening Gap*, p. 59.

⁷ Robert Drago & Vicky Lovell, *San Francisco's Paid Sick Leave Ordinance: Outcomes for Employers and Employees*, IWPR, Feb. 2011, p. 12.

⁸ See, e.g., Heymann, *The Widening Gap*, p. 57; Vicky Lovell, "Valuing Good Health: An Estimate of Costs and Savings for the Healthy Families Act," IWPR, April 2005, p. 15; J. Heymann, Alison Earle & Brian Egleston, "Parental Availability for the Care of Sick Children," *PEDIATRICS* 98, Aug. 1, 1996.

⁹ IWPR, "Women and Paid Sick Days: Crucial for Family Well-Being," Fact Sheet, Feb. 2007, p. 2 (citing Alina Salganicoff, Usha R. Ranji & Roberta Wyn, "Women and Health Care: A National Profile," Kaiser Family Foundation, July 2005, p. vii).

¹⁰ Reiss, et. al., *Sick in the City*, pp. 11-12. New York City public school parents living below the poverty line have the lowest access to paid sick leave; 69% of these parents lack paid sick time.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11 (finding that 30% of low-income working custodial parents who lack paid sick leave reported sending a sick child to school or day care in the past year due to their inability to take off from work—a higher percentage than among low-income working parents with paid sick time).

¹² "Mary Pappas, RN, Calls for Paid Sick Days Law," Working Families Party, Sept. 8, 2009, available at www.workingfamiliesparty.org/2009/09/mary-pappas-rn-calls-for-paid-sick-days-laws/.

¹³ National Association of School Nurses, "NASN Legislative Priorities for 2011," June 2011, available at www.nasn.org/portals/0/legislation/2011_06_leg_priorities.pdf.

¹⁴ See, e.g., IWPR, "Women and Paid Sick Days," p. 1; National Partnership for Women & Families, "Paid Sick Days Improve Our Public Health," Fact Sheet, Sept. 2010.

¹⁵ Reiss, et. al., *Sick in the City*, p. 12.

¹⁶ Drago & Lovell, *San Francisco's Paid Sick Leave Ordinance*, p. 1.