



POLICY BRIEF

GUARANTEE PAID SICK DAYS AND HEALTHY FAMILIES

THE PROBLEM

Across the country, women are struggling to care for themselves and their loved ones while paying the bills and supporting their families. Despite the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic about the importance of giving people time away from work to recover when they are sick, too many workers are still without this basic protection.

In 2023, [one in four civilian workers](#) in the United States lacked any paid sick days, including a majority of people working in the [lowest paying jobs](#), who often [cannot afford to take time off](#) when they are sick or need care—a phenomenon that not only harms individuals and their families, but also presents a risk to [public health](#). Women in the service sector—which accounts for nearly 20% of the country’s workforce—are less likely to have [access to paid sick days](#) than their male counterparts. In 2022, [Latinas across all occupations were the least likely](#) of any group to have access to paid sick days. This disparity compounds gender inequality and economic insecurity, especially as mothers of color are often serving dual roles as [both primary caregivers and breadwinners](#) for their families. For workers without paid sick days, taking even a few days off to recover from an illness could mean losing wages equivalent to monthly costs for [groceries, gas, or household utilities](#) like electricity and heat. These realities leave working people with the impossible choice between taking care of their health or caring for a sick loved one and maintaining their financial security.

THE SOLUTION

- **Guarantee that all workers, regardless of the size of their employer, can accrue at least seven paid sick days each year.** Sick time should be paid at an employee’s regular rate of pay.
- **Provide sick days that can be used in cases of personal illness,** to access preventative care, to provide care to a sick family member, and to attend school meetings related to a child’s health.
- **Allow workers to use paid sick days for “safe leave” to recover from or receive support** related to an incidence of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.
- **Protect workers from retaliation or discrimination when using their earned sick time,** including prohibitions on having hours reduced or shifts changed.
- **Ensure workers can take sick time to care for a broad range of family members,** including spouses, domestic partners, parents, children of any age, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, and other individuals who comprise someone’s “chosen family.” Survey data shows that LGBTQI+ workers are [more likely to rely on chosen family](#) when they are sick, making it vital for paid sick time laws to recognize the full range of caregiving relationships. And people of color and immigrants are [more likely to live in multigenerational households](#), where they may need to provide care to a wider range of family members.
- **Minimize certification or documentation requirements for short absences.** Many workers [face barriers in obtaining appointments with health care providers](#); by limiting the circumstances in which documentation is required, more workers will be able to use their earned sick time. And for workers recovering from common illnesses like flu, medical intervention may not even be necessary, and requiring a doctor’s note adds an unnecessary burden to utilizing leave.

TALKING POINTS ON THE SOLUTION

- **Paid sick days improve public health.** Providing workers with time off when they or their loved ones are sick can help [reduce the spread of illness](#), and workers are more likely to [seek medical care](#) when they are sick.
- **Paid sick time laws are effective.** After Congress enacted temporary, limited paid sick time under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), research shows that [infection rates began to slow](#), helping “flatten the curve.” In states without an existing paid sick days program, FFCRA sick leave led to a 56% decrease in COVID-19 infections across the state.
- **Providing workers with paid sick days increases flu vaccination rates, which can help slow the spread of diseases.** Parents with paid sick time are also better able to [access health care for their children](#), including immunizations and regular doctor’s visits.
- **Paid sick time laws can reduce racial and gender disparities in access to paid sick days.** Without guaranteed access, people working in service sector jobs—where women and people of color are overrepresented—are [unlikely](#) to have paid sick days. [Part-time workers](#)—who are predominantly women—are also far less likely to have access to paid sick days than full-time workers. Closing the racial disparity in access to paid sick days is important because everyone, no matter their race, should be able to go to the doctor, rest when they are sick, and care for the people they love.
- **Paid sick days contribute to a more robust overall economy.** Research from states with guaranteed paid sick time shows that laws have a positive impact on [local economies](#).
- **Paid sick days benefit businesses.** Workers with access to paid sick days can stay home when they are sick, thereby avoiding presenteeism—a phenomenon that [costs the employers billions of dollars each year](#). In addition, employers who provide paid leave see less employee turnover, which in turn [reduces costs to employers](#).

PUBLIC POPULARITY

- Providing workers with paid sick days is popular. [Eighty-two percent of voters nationally](#) support paid sick days for workers.

STATES AND LOCALITIES THAT HAVE PASSED THESE POLICIES

- Currently, [15 states](#), including New Mexico and Minnesota, along with major cities and counties around the country, have passed laws that guarantee workers can earn sick time.
- In [Washington State](#), a study found that guaranteed paid sick days meant more workers were able to stay home when they were sick, reducing rates of “presenteeism,” which helped keep workers healthy and productive. And in [Connecticut](#), paid sick days were shown to reduce on-the-job injuries.