

Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools: The Case for a National Paid Sick Days Standard

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We all want what's best for our kids. Both parents and educators know firsthand the importance of keeping children healthy, and access to paid sick days for parents can make a real difference. Yet nationally, more than 32 million private sector workers – 27 percent of the country's private sector workforce – cannot take a single paid sick day to recover from their own illness, let alone to care for a sick child.¹

When adults cannot access paid sick days, children, schools and communities suffer.

- Any parent or teacher knows that kids in school or day care frequently get sick. More than two-thirds of school-aged children miss a day or more of school each year due to illness or injury.²
- Many people risk their jobs if they stay home to care for a sick child. Many parents of young children report that taking time away from work to care for a sick child is extremely difficult because they risk losing pay or their job.³
- Nationwide, parents without paid sick days are *more than twice as likely* as those with paid sick days to send a sick child to school or day care. They are also *five times* as likely to take a child or family member to an emergency room because they cannot take time off during their work day.⁴
- There are nearly 82 million children currently enrolled in school – from nursery school to high school – in the United States.⁵ When sick children go to school, they risk their own health and that of other children, teachers and administrators. School-aged children often have higher rates of flu infection than adults, and places such as

“I WORK AT AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. I HAVE SEEN MANY CHILDREN COME TO SCHOOL SO SICK THEY COULD HARDLY STAND, SOME EVEN WITH FEVERS. WHEN WE WOULD OFFER TO SEND THEM TO THE OFFICE, THE CHILDREN WOULD OFTEN CRY AND BEG NOT TO BE SENT HOME BECAUSE THEY HAD ALREADY BEEN TOLD BY THEIR MOM OR DAD THAT THEY COULD NOT MISS WORK BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT AFFORD IT. KIDS SHOULD NEVER HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THEIR PARENTS’ LOSS OF INCOME WHEN THEY ARE SICK.”

— Tina, Toledo, Ohio

schools are a risk factor for flu transmission.⁶ And research consistently shows that student performance and overall achievement is lower when teachers are absent.⁷

- Sick children can also put a strain on limited school resources. According to the National Association of School Nurses, only 39 percent of the nation's public schools have a full-time, on-site nurse. About one-third of schools have a nurse who works part time – often dividing their hours between multiple school buildings – and a full 25 percent of schools have no nurse at all.⁸ This means that, when parents send their children to school sick, not only does the risk of spreading illness increase, but on-site nurses who are already stretched thin can also easily be overburdened by sick students who should be at home.

Paid sick days help parents meet their children's care needs – helping lead to fewer absences and better long-term academic success.

- Sick children have more trouble learning, and it is more difficult for teachers to teach them.⁹ Healthy children miss fewer days of school and experience fewer behavioral problems.¹⁰
- When parents have paid sick days, they can take their children to get regular checkups and immunizations – including flu shots – which help children stay healthy. Parents are able to use preventive care to address their children's health conditions, keeping manageable problems from leading to hospitalizations or additional school absences and promoting academic success.¹¹
- Children whose parents are able to earn paid sick days are 12.5 percent more likely to receive flu vaccinations, 13 percent more likely to receive their annual checkups, have better maintenance of chronic illnesses and are less likely to receive delayed medical care or be taken to emergency care.¹²
- Additionally, sick children recover better when cared for by their parents.¹³ Among children with serious illnesses, the presence of a parent shortens a child's hospital stay by 31 percent.¹⁴ Active parental involvement in a child's care may head off future health care needs, partly due to increased parental education and awareness.¹⁵

The public understands the importance of paid sick days.

Eighty-five percent of voters say employers should offer paid sick days.¹⁶ States, cities and counties have been leading the way to pass laws guaranteeing workers the right to earn paid sick days. But it is past time to create a national standard to ensure all workers, no matter where they live or work, have access to paid sick time to keep themselves, their children, their families and their communities healthy.

The Healthy Families Act would set a much-needed national paid sick days standard.

Specifically, it would:

- Allow workers in businesses with 15 or more employees to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year to recover from illness, access preventive care, provide care for a sick child or family member, or attend school meetings related to a child's health condition or disability. Workers in businesses with fewer than 15 employees would earn up to seven job-protected unpaid sick days each year to be used for the same reasons, unless their employers choose to offer paid sick days.
- Allow workers who are survivors of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault to use their paid sick days to recover or seek assistance related to an incident.
- Allow employers that already offer paid sick days to continue using their existing policies, as long as they meet the minimums set forth in the Healthy Families Act (for time, types of use and method of use).

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019, September 19). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2019* (Table 31). Retrieved 24 September 2019, from <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2019.pdf>

² U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. (2018, February). *Summary Health Statistics: National Health Interview Survey, 2016* (Table C-6c). Retrieved 28 August 2019, from https://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Health_Statistics/NCHS/NHIS/SHS/2016_SHS_Table_C-6.pdf

³ University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital (2012). *C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health: Sick Kids, Struggling Parents*. Retrieved 28 August 2019, from <http://mottnpch.org/sites/default/files/documents/10222012ChildCareIllness.pdf>

⁴ Smith, T. W., & Kim, J. (2010, June). *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences* (Table 23). National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago for the Public Welfare Foundation Publication. Retrieved 28 August 2019, from <http://www.issuelab.org/resources/10518/10518.pdf> (Unpublished calculation)

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017 Table S1401: School Enrollment*. Retrieved 28 August 2019, from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_S1401&prodType=table (Calculation does not include students enrolled in college or university)

⁶ Iuliano, A. D., Dawood, F. S., Silk, B. J., Bhattaria, A., Copeland, D. et al. (2011, January). Investigating 2009 Pandemic Influenza A (H1N1) in US Schools: What Have We Learned? *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 52(1): S161-S167. DOI: 10.1093/cid/ciq032

⁷ Miller, R. (2012, November). *Teacher Absence as a Leading Indicator of Student Achievement: New National Data Offer Opportunity to Examine Cost of Teacher Absence Relative to Learning Loss*. Center for American Progress Publication. Retrieved 28 August 2019, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/TeacherAbsence-6.pdf>

⁸ Willgerodt, M. A., Brock, D. M., & Maughan, E. M. (2018). Public School Nursing Practice in the United States. National Association of School Nurses. *Journal of School Nursing*, 34(3), 232-244. Retrieved 28 August 2019 from https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f-215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/Advocacy/2017_Workforce_Study_Infographic_School_Nurses_in_the_Nation.pdf

⁹ Haas, S. A., & Fosse, N. E. (2008, June). Health and the Educational Attainment of Adolescents: Evidence from the NLSY97. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 49(2): 178-192.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Towne, S., Gunn-Wright, R., Miller, K., & Gault, B. (2011, October). *Denver Paid Sick Days Would Promote Children's School Success*. Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 28 August 2019, from <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/B300-PSDandDenverSchools.pdf>

¹² Afsaw, A. & Colopy, M., (2017, March). Association between Parental Access to Paid Sick Leave and Children’s Access to and Use of Healthcare Services (Table II). *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 60(3), 276-284.

¹³ Schuster, M. A., & Chung, P. J. (2014, August). Time Off to Care for a Sick Child—Why Family-Leave Policies Matter. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 371(6), 493-495.

¹⁴ Heymann, J. (2001). *The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families Are in Jeopardy - and What Can Be Done About It*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

¹⁵ Heymann, J., & Earle, A. (2010). *Raising the Global Floor: Dismantling the Myth that We Can't Afford Good Working Conditions for Everyone*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

¹⁶ The New York Times and CBS News Poll. (2015, June 3). Americans’ Views on Income Inequality and Workers’ Rights. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 28 August 2019, from <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/04/business/inequality-poll.html>

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