

# 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. But, nationally, more than 26 million workers cannot take a single paid sick day to recover from their own illness, let alone care for a sick child.<sup>1</sup> In a recent survey, when a child stayed at home in the last eight weeks, only about one in four parents was able to take paid time off to be home with them.<sup>2</sup>

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

- There are nearly 59 million children currently enrolled in schools in the United States, from nursery school to high school.<sup>3</sup> Millions of these children will need to stay home due to illness or quarantine this school year: in one recent week alone, 120,422 children in the U.S. tested positive for COVID-19.<sup>4</sup> Even in a non-pandemic year, seven in ten school-aged children miss a day or more of school each year due to illness or injury.<sup>5</sup>
- 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.<sup>6</sup>
- In August 2021, an average of one in five parents a week faced an interruption in their childcare arrangements in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> With widespread returns to in-person school and the continuing pandemic, that is likely to get worse as families face

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**“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

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school and childcare closures, quarantines and the spread of other illnesses. Even before the school year began, children were experiencing an unseasonable surge in severe colds, croup and respiratory syncytial virus.<sup>8</sup>

- 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.<sup>9</sup> When sick children go to school, they risk their own health and that of other children, teachers and staff.

### **Paid sick days are a proven strategy to reduce disease spread.**

- At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which provided many workers across the country with emergency paid sick time and paid leave for childcare. This emergency leave had a huge effect and helped flatten the curve in the United States: in the states where workers gained access to emergency sick leave because of FFCRA, there were 400 fewer coronavirus cases per state per day, which translated to a national impact of 15,000 fewer cases per day.<sup>10</sup>
- While FFCRA greatly helped those who gained access to paid sick days, along with their families and thousands of people who were spared exposure to coronavirus, it left too many people out with its many exemptions and expired at the end of 2020 while the pandemic was still in full force. A permanent, national paid sick days policy that covers all workers is the best safeguard against future pandemics.

### **The public understands the importance of paid sick days.**

- Based on the success of FFCRA's temporary paid sick leave benefit, eighty-two percent of voters support a permanent paid sick days law.<sup>11</sup> 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 permanent 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.

### **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.<sup>12</sup> Healthy children miss fewer days of school and experience fewer behavioral problems.<sup>13</sup> And research consistently shows that student performance and overall achievement is lower when teachers are absent.<sup>14</sup>
- When parents have paid sick days, they can take their children to get checkups, vaccines, and regular care for chronic illnesses, which help children stay healthy. Parents with paid sick days can use preventive care to address their children's health

conditions, promoting academic success by keeping manageable problems from leading to excessive school absences.<sup>15</sup>

- Additionally, sick children recover better when cared for by their parents.<sup>16</sup> Among children with serious illnesses, the presence of a parent shortens a child's hospital stay by 31 percent.<sup>17</sup> Active parental involvement in a child's care may head off future health care needs, partly due to increased parental education and awareness.<sup>18</sup>

## **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.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2021*. (Table 33). Retrieved 29 September 2021, from <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2021/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2021.pdf>. Unpublished calculation based on number of private sector workers represented (see Technical Note).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2021, August). *Household Pulse Survey Data Education Tables: Weeks 28-35* (Education Table 2. Childcare Arrangements in the Last 4 Weeks for Children Under 5 Years Old). Retrieved 25 August 2021 from the U.S. Census Bureau website: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>. Prior to Weeks 34 and 35, the Childcare Arrangements in the Last 4 Weeks Table was identified as Education Table 6 and applied to children of all ages. Calculations were derived by averaging the use of paid leave for childcare interruptions and averaging the number of childcare arrangements, both over the course of 8 weeks

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019 Table S1401: School Enrollment*. Retrieved 25 August 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S1401&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1401>

<sup>4</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics and Children's Hospital Association. (2021, August 12). *Children and COVID-19: State Data Report* (Fig. 6. *United States: Number of Child COVID-19 Cases Added in Past Week*). Retrieved 25 August 2021, from <https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/AAP%20and%20CHA%20-%20Children%20and%20COVID-19%20State%20Data%20Report%208.12%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. (2019, September). *Summary Health Statistics: National Health Interview Survey, 2018* (Table C-6a). Retrieved 25 August 2021, from [https://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Health\\_Statistics/NCHS/NHIS/SHS/2018\\_SHS\\_Table\\_C-6.pdf](https://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Health_Statistics/NCHS/NHIS/SHS/2018_SHS_Table_C-6.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> 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 25 August 2021, from <http://mottnpch.org/sites/default/files/documents/10222012ChildCareIllness.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See note 2.

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<sup>8</sup> Edwards, E. (2021, July 21). Viruses are landing kids in the ICU this summer, but it's not all Covid. *NBCNews.com*. Retrieved 25 August 2021, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/viruses-are-landing-kids-icu-summer-it-s-not-all-n1274355>

<sup>9</sup> 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 25 August 2021, from <http://www.issuelab.org/resources/10518/10518.pdf> (Unpublished calculation)

<sup>10</sup> Pichler, S., Wen, K., & Ziebarth, N.R. (2020, October 15). COVID-19 Emergency Sick Leave Has Helped Flatten The Curve In The United States. *Health Affairs*, 39(12), doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00863

<sup>11</sup> National telephone poll conducted with 1,200 adults on landlines and cellphones October 31–November 2, 2020, by the Lake Research Partners and the Tarrance Group. Retrieved 25 August 2021, from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/voters-show-bipartisan-support-for-permanent-paid-sick-days-and-paid-family-and-medical-leave.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> 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. doi: 10.1177/002214650804900205

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> 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 23 August 2021, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/TeacherAbsence-6.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> 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 25 August 2021, from <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-general/denver-paid-sick-days-would-promote-childrens-school-success/>

<sup>16</sup> 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. doi: 10.1056/NEJMp1404860

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

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