

Paid Sick Days Benefit **Children's Health**

APRIL 2013

Children inevitably get sick – and they get better faster when their parents care for them. Unfortunately, tens of millions of workers in the United States are not able to earn paid days to care for a sick child. These parents are left with impossible choices: leave a sick child home alone, send a sick child to school or day care, or stay home with the child and risk losing pay or being fired. **A paid sick days standard would strengthen families by helping parents manage their responsibilities on the job and at home – and protect the health of their children.**

Working Parents Face an Unnecessary Choice

The fact that millions of working parents lack paid sick days has created a situation in which a child's health is too often pitted against the economic security of the child's family. **A paid sick days standard is necessary to ease this tension and safeguard children's health.**

- ▶ **Children inevitably get sick and are best cared for by a parent or guardian.** In the first two years of life alone, most children have eight to 10 colds.¹ At this age, even mild illnesses require rest and parental supervision – and often a doctor's visit. When children become seriously ill, studies show that they recover faster when cared for by their parents. The mere presence of a parent shortens a child's hospital stay by 31 percent.² And active parental involvement in children's hospital care may head off future health care needs, partly due to increased parental education and awareness.³ But workers without paid sick days are more likely to delay needed medical care for their family members – including their children.⁴
- ▶ **For parents without paid sick days, staying home or taking their child to the doctor is often not an option – putting the child and others at risk.** Parents without paid sick days are more than twice as likely as parents with paid sick days to send a sick child to school or day care.⁵ And they are five times more likely to report taking their child or a family member to the emergency room because they were unable to take time off work during normal work hours.⁶ When parents have no choice but to send a sick child to school or child care, the child's health is put at risk – as is the health of other children, teachers and child care providers.⁷ The result is increased contagion and higher rates of infection for all.
- ▶ **Access to paid sick days allows parents to get their children essential preventive care.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends six well-child visits – check-ups – in the first year of life, three in the second, and 17 from ages 2 through 21. However, fewer than half of U.S. children are getting adequate preventive care.⁸ When parents have paid sick days, they are able to take their children to well-child visits and for immunizations, which may prevent serious illnesses.⁹

Paid Sick Days Protect Children's Health and Families' Livelihood

Working parents need a basic workplace standard of paid sick days so they don't have to choose between their jobs and their children's health. Currently, no federal law guarantees paid sick days, but Connecticut and four cities provide some private sector workers with this basic right. Throughout the country, people are mobilizing in support of paid sick days laws. About 20 states and cities have recently introduced paid sick days bills or have active campaigns.

Paid sick days legislation, such as **the federal Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1286/S. 631)**, would allow workers to earn up to seven paid sick days a year to recover from their own illness, care for a sick child or other family member, or attend diagnostic and medical appointments. It is an important step in securing a healthy future for working families and their children.

1 Shelov, S. MD, and Altman, T. MD, eds. (2009, October 13). *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5*. American Academy of Pediatrics. New York, NY: Aspen Publishers, Inc.

2 Heymann, J. (2001, October 15). *The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families Are in Jeopardy—and What Can Be Done About It*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

3 Palmer, S. (1993, February). *Care of sick children by parents: A meaningful role*. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 18(2), 185–191.

4 Miller, K., Williams, C. & Yi, Y. (2011, October 31). *Paid Sick Days and Health: Cost Savings from Reduced Emergency Department Visits*. Institute for Women's Policy Research publication.

5 Smith, T., & Kim, J. (2010, June). *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences*. National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago for the Public Welfare Foundation Publication. Retrieved 30 May 2012, from <http://www.publicwelfare.org/resources/DocFiles/psd2010final.pdf>. Unpublished calculation.

6 Ibid.

7 Lovell, V. (2004, June). *No Time to be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don't have Paid Sick Days*. Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 30 May 2012, from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/no-time-to-be-sick-why-everyone-suffers-when-workers-don2019t-have-paid-sick-leave-b242>

8 Chung, P., et al. (2006, April). *Preventive Care For Children In The United States: Quality And Barriers*. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 27, 491–515. Retrieved 30 May 2012, from http://www.allhealth.org/briefingmaterials/preventive_care_children-575.pdf

9 See note 2.