

Paid Sick Days

Over 80% of low-wage (\$8.25 or less per hour) workers do not have access to any paid sick days. For these workers, who are disproportionately women and people of color, missing a day (or a few days) of paid work can have significant economic consequences. A major illness can drive a worker into poverty. In addition to lost wages, workers are often penalized in other ways for taking time off for an illness or to care for a sick family member. Domestic violence survivors also face unique challenges due to a lack of paid “safe” days which would allow them to take care of legal, housing, and health needs.

YWCA USA Position

YWCA USA supports women’s economic empowerment. Lack of access to paid sick days to care for oneself and family is a critical problem that contributes to the gender wage gap as well as racial income inequality. Everyone gets sick sometimes, but workers without paid sick days cannot afford to take time off to get better. Lost wages due to illness or caretaking widens the wage gap and makes it more challenging for workers to balance work and family responsibilities. In absence of this basic workplace protection, workers are often forced to choose between their job and taking time off of work to care for oneself or a family member.

YWCA USA supports legislation that creates a national standard for paid sick days, such as the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1286/S. 631) introduced in the 113th Congress. This legislation would ensure that workers in most businesses can earn up to seven paid sick days each year. Businesses covered by the legislation include those that employ 15 or more employees and are engaged in commerce. Additionally, the Healthy Families Act would ensure that workers can use this time without penalty to recuperate from their own illness, care for a family member, or seek assistance for an experience of domestic violence, stalking, or sexual assault.

Paid Sick Days Facts

- 43% of women private sector workers do not have access to any paid sick days. ^[1]
- More than half of working mothers cannot use paid sick days to care for their children when they are sick. ^[2]

- More than half of Latina workers and more than four in ten African American women workers do not have access to any paid sick days. ^[3]
- Just 3.5 unpaid sick days can cost an entire month of groceries for the typical family without paid sick days. ^[4]
- Because survivors of domestic violence are at an even higher risk of violence as they leave an abuser, paid safe days can provide the opportunity to take necessary safety steps and seek out assistance without lost wages. ^[5]
- A 2010 survey by IWPR of registered voters found that more than two-thirds of registered voters (69 percent) endorse laws to provide paid sick days. ^[6]
- Paid Sick days legislation is gaining momentum on the state and local levels. Three U.S. states and sixteen cities have passed paid sick days legislation. ^[7]

[1] Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2011, March). Paid Sick Day Access Rates by Gender and Race/Ethnicity. Retrieved from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-day-access-rates-by-gender-and-race-ethnicity-2010>

[2] Smith, K., & Schaefer, A. (2012, June). Who Cares for the Sick Kids? Parents' Access to Paid Time to Care for a Sick Child. Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire publication. Retrieved from <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/sites/carseyinstitute.unh.edu/files/publications/IB-Smith-Paid-Sick-Leave-2012.pdf>

[3] National Partnership for Women and Families. Support Paid Sick Days. Retrieved from www.paid sick days.org

[4] Gould, E., Filion, K., & Green, A. (2011, June). The need for paid sick days: The lack of a federal policy further erodes family economic security. Economic Policy Institute publication. Retrieved from http://www.epi.org/publication/the_need_for_paid_sick_days/

[5] National Network to End Domestic Violence. Frequently Asked Questions About Domestic Violence. Retrieved from <http://www.nnedv.org/resources/stats/faqaboutdv.html>

[6] Majority of Workers Support Workplace Flexibility, Job Quality, and Family Support Policies. Institute for Women's Policy Research, (29 Oct. 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.iwpr.org/press-room/press-releases/majority-of-workers-support-workplace-flexibility-job-quality-and-family-support-policies>

[7] Strasser, A. (2014, Nov). Last Night, One Million Workers Were Guaranteed The Right To Take Time Off When They're Sick. Retrieved from <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2014/11/05/3589146/sick-leave-election-2014/>