

# The Healthy Families Act

APRIL 2013

No one should face the impossible choice of caring for their health or keeping their paycheck or job. But more than 40 million private sector workers – 40 percent of the workforce – must make this decision every time illness strikes because they don't have access to earned paid sick days.<sup>1</sup> An additional 4.2 million don't have this basic right because they haven't been on the job long enough to be eligible.<sup>2</sup> And millions more lack paid sick time to care for a sick child. At a time when families' finances are stretched thin, working families need the job and economic security paid sick days provide.

## A Basic Workplace Standard

**The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1286/S. 631) would set a national paid sick days standard – a critical step toward meeting the health and financial needs of working families.**

**The Healthy Families Act would:**

- ▶ Allow workers in businesses with 15 or more employees **to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year** to be used to recover from their own illnesses, access preventive care or provide care to a sick family member.
- ▶ Allow workers who are **victims of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault** to use their paid sick days to recover or seek assistance related to an incident.
- ▶ Include a **simple method for calculating accrued sick time**. Workers would earn a minimum of one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, up to 56 hours (seven days) per year, unless the employer selects a higher limit.
- ▶ **Allow employers to require certification** if an employee uses more than three paid sick days in a row. For victims of domestic violence, the certification may be from a law enforcement officer or victim advocate.
- ▶ **Allow employers to use 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.

---

**The Healthy Families Act would let 30 million more workers earn paid sick days, expanding access to 90 percent of the private sector workforce.**

— Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress. (2010, March).

---

## Paid Sick Days Benefit Families, Business and our Economy

A national paid sick days standard would help working families meet their health and financial needs while boosting productivity and improving worker retention for businesses and strengthening our economy.

- ▶ **Paid sick days provide families with economic security.** Workers without paid sick days have to either go to work sick or stay home, lose pay and risk job loss or workplace discipline. Nearly one-quarter of adults in the United States (23 percent) report that they have lost a job or have been threatened with job loss for taking time off due to illness or to care for a sick child or relative.<sup>3</sup> Many workers simply can't afford to jeopardize the economic security of their families by staying home. Just 3.5 unpaid days off can cost a family without access to paid sick days, on average, its entire monthly grocery budget.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ **Providing paid sick days is cost effective.** Working people with paid sick days are more productive and less likely to leave their jobs, which saves businesses money by reducing turnover. And “presenteeism” – when employees work sick – is estimated to cost our national economy \$160 billion in lost productivity each year.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ **Paid sick days reduce community contagion.** Workers without paid sick days are more likely to report going to work with a contagious illness like the flu or a viral infection — and risk infecting others.<sup>6</sup> Workers in restaurants and industries that require frequent contact with the public are among the least likely to have paid sick days. For example, nearly three in four food service workers (73 percent) and workers in child care centers and nursing homes don't have paid sick days.<sup>7</sup> This poses a serious threat to public health.
- ▶ **Paid sick days can decrease health care costs.** If all workers had paid sick days, it is estimated that 1.3 million emergency room visits could be prevented each year in the United States, saving \$1.1 billion in health care costs annually. More than half of these savings – \$517 million – would go to taxpayer-funded health insurance programs such as Medicare and the State Children's Health Insurance Program.<sup>8</sup>

## Working Families Need the Healthy Families Act

**Paid sick days policies have been enacted successfully at the state and local levels, but America's working families deserve a national standard.** Workers everywhere should have the same right to take a day away from work to get the medical care they need, to care for a feverish child or to assist a parent with a broken hip. The Healthy Families Act would establish a much-needed national standard.

For more information, visit [www.PaidSickDays.org](http://www.PaidSickDays.org).

1 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2011, March). *Employee Benefits Survey Table 33. Leave benefits: Access, private industry workers, National Compensation Survey*. Retrieved 13 June 2012, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2011/ownership/private/table21a.pdf>

2 Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2010, December). *Fact Sheet: 44 Million U.S. Workers Lacked Paid Sick Days in 2010*. Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 19 June 2012, from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/44-million-u.s.-workers-lacked-paid-sick-days-in-2010-77-percent-of-food-service-workers-lacked-access>

3 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 19 June 2012, from <http://www.publicwelfare.org/resources/DocFiles/psd2010final.pdf>

4 Gould, E., Filion, K., & Green, A. (2011, June 29). *The Need for Paid Sick Days*. Economic Policy Institute Publication. Retrieved 13 June 2012, from [http://www.epi.org/publication/the\\_need\\_for\\_paid\\_sick\\_days/](http://www.epi.org/publication/the_need_for_paid_sick_days/)

5 Stewart, W., Ricci, J.A., Chee, E., et al. (2003, December). *Lost Productive Health Time Costs from Health Conditions in the United States: Results from the American Productivity Audit*. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 45(12), 1234-1246. Retrieved 13 June 2012, from [http://www.workhealth.org/whatsnew/whnewrap/Stewart%20etal\\_lost%20productive%20work%20time%20costs%20from%20health%20conditions%20in%20the%20US%20Results%20from%20the%20American%20Productivity%20Audit%202003.pdf](http://www.workhealth.org/whatsnew/whnewrap/Stewart%20etal_lost%20productive%20work%20time%20costs%20from%20health%20conditions%20in%20the%20US%20Results%20from%20the%20American%20Productivity%20Audit%202003.pdf)

6 See note 3

7 Joint Economic Committee, United States Congress. (2010, March). *Expanding Access to Paid Sick Leave: The Impact of the Healthy Families Act on America's Workers*. Retrieved 13 June, 2012, from [http://jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File\\_id=abf8aca7-6b94-4152-b720-2d8d04b81ed6](http://jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=abf8aca7-6b94-4152-b720-2d8d04b81ed6)

8 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. Retrieved 13 June 2012, from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-days-and-health-cost-savings-from-reduced-emergency-department-visits>