

Why Working Families Need Paid Sick Days

- **Nearly half (48%) of full-time, private-sector workers have NO paid sick days**, and a total of 57 million working Americans can't take a single paid sick day to care for their own health.ⁱ
- **Lower wage workers are hit hardest. Over three in four low-wage workers (79%) have no paid sick days.**ⁱⁱ Research from the Urban Institute also shows that for working parents with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line, 41% have no paid leave of any kind (no paid sick leave, no paid vacation, and no paid personal days).
- **Ninety-four million working Americans do not have paid sick days to use to care for a sick child.** Recent research finds that parents without at-home caregivers need about 4 days per year to care for sick school-age children. Because having access to paid leave is the primary factor in a parent's decision to stay home with sick children, having no paid time off means that children often go to school sick, spread illness, miss important doctor visits, and experience worse short- and long-term health outcomes.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **More families will be caring for an elderly parent in the future.** As Baby Boomers head toward retirement, more working families will provide care for elderly parents. The elderly represented 12.4 percent of the population in the year 2000, but are expected to comprise 20 percent of the population by 2030.^{iv} In one longitudinal study, more than a third of Americans (35 percent) had significant elder care responsibilities, and more than a third of this group were forced to reduce their work hours or take time off to provide care.^v
- **The problem is particularly acute for working women**, who are still predominantly responsible for meeting family caregiving needs. Almost half (49%) of working mothers report that they must miss work when a child is sick. And of these mothers, 49% do not get paid when they miss work to care for a sick child.^{vi}
- **The lack of paid sick days is a public health concern.** Workers who disproportionately lack paid sick days work with the public every day. Only 22 percent of food and public accommodation workers have any paid sick leave. Workers in child care centers, retail clerks, and nursing homes also disproportionately lack this important benefit.^{vii} When workers go to work sick, all are at risk of increased contagion.
- **Healthy workers are critical to a productive and vibrant economy.** By providing paid sick days, employers would benefit from reduced turnover, higher productivity, and reducing the spread of contagion in the workplace. If workers were provided just 7 paid sick days per year, our national economy would experience a net savings of \$8.1 billion per year.^{viii}
- **Everyone gains.** Children and family members will receive the care they need, employers will experience savings in reduced turnover, consumers will be less likely to catch an illness from public spaces, and all will benefit from an overall improvement in well-being.

ⁱ Testimony of Dr. Heidi Hartmann, Institute for Women's Policy Research, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, 2006.

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- ii Jody Heymann, *The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families are in Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About*
- iii Basic Books, 2000.
- iii Hartmann, 2006.
- iv Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging. *Statistics on the Aging Population*, Accessed October 2005, www.aoa.gov/prof/statistics/statistics.asp.
- v Families and Work Institute, Highlights of the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce, accessed October 2005.
- vi Kaiser Family Foundation, "Women, Work and Family Health: A Balancing Act," Issue Brief, April 2003.
- vii Hartmann, 2006.
- viii Vicky Lovell, *Valuing Good Health: An Estimate of Costs and Savings for the Healthy Families Act*, Institute of Women's Policy Research, 2005.