

# 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 37 million private sector workers – 32 percent of the country's private sector workforce – cannot take a single paid sick day to recover from their own illnesses, let alone to care for a sick child.<sup>1</sup>

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

- ▶ Any parent or teacher knows that kids in school or day care frequently get sick. More than two-thirds of school-aged children miss a day or more of school each year due to illness or injury.<sup>2</sup> But more than half of U.S. working parents (52 percent) don't have even a few paid sick days they can use to care for a sick child.<sup>3</sup> When their children are ill, these parents must make impossible choices between their child's care and their financial security.
- ▶ Many people risk their jobs if they stay home to care for a sick child. One in three parents report that taking time away from work to care for a sick child is extremely difficult because they risk losing pay or a job.<sup>4</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. They are also *five times* as likely to take a child or family member to an emergency room because they cannot take time off during their work days.<sup>5</sup>

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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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There are nearly 60 million children in pre-school through high school in the United States.<sup>6</sup> When sick children go to school, they risk their own health and that of other children, teachers and administrators. Contagious illnesses like the flu actually spread more quickly in schools than in the workplace.<sup>7</sup> And research consistently shows that student performance and overall achievement is lower when teachers are absent.<sup>8</sup>

- ▶ Sick children can also put a strain on limited school resources. According to the National Association of School Nurses, only 42 percent of the nation’s public schools have a full-time, on-site nurse. One-third of schools have a nurse who works part time – often dividing their hours between multiple school buildings – and a full 25 percent have no nurse at all.<sup>9</sup> This means that, when parents send their children to school sick, not only does the risk of spreading illness increase, but on-site nurses who are already stretched thin can also easily be overburdened by sick students who should be at home.

**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>10</sup> Healthy children are more focused, miss fewer days of school and experience fewer behavioral problems.<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ When parents have paid sick days, they can take their children to get regular checkups and immunizations, which help children stay healthy. Parents are able to use preventive care to address their children’s health conditions, keeping manageable problems from leading to hospitalizations or additional school absences and promoting academic success.<sup>12</sup>
- ▶ Children whose parents are able to earn paid sick days are 12.5 percent more likely to receive flu vaccinations and 13.2 percent more likely to receive their annual checkups. If they have chronic illnesses, they are better managed. They are also less likely to receive delayed medical care or be taken to emergency care.<sup>13</sup>
- ▶ Studies show that sick children recover better when cared for by their parents.<sup>14</sup> Among children with serious illnesses, the presence of a parent shortens a child’s hospital stay by 31 percent.<sup>15</sup> Active parental involvement in a child’s care may also head off future health care needs, partly due to increased parental education and awareness.<sup>16</sup>

**The public understands the importance of paid sick days.** Eighty-five percent of voters say employers should offer paid sick days.<sup>17</sup> But a patchwork of local, state and employer policies does not ensure that all workers have access to paid sick time to keep themselves, their children, their families and their communities healthy.

**The Healthy Families Act would set a 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 (for time, types of use and method of use).

**Learn more and take action at [PaidSickDays.org](http://PaidSickDays.org).**

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The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](http://NationalPartnership.org).

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