



Sick Days & Worker Safety

April 2013

Talking Points

The newly-realized connection between workplace safety and paid sick days has added to the mounting evidence that the need for sensible labor standards is more important than ever. Common sense policies, such as offering paid sick days and improving workplace health and safety standards, are crucial to the economic security of our families and the stability of our nation's economy.

Recent research shows link between access to paid sick days and lower incidence of workplace injury

- Workers with paid sick days are **28 percent** less likely than those without leave to be injured.¹
- The rate of non-fatal occupational injuries for the workers who had access to paid sick leave was 2.59 per 100 full time workers, as compared to 4.18 for those who did not have paid sick leave.²
- Many of the same industries that suffer from a high number of worker safety problems also suffer from not offering paid sick days, including construction and home health care workers.

Workers need paid sick days to prevent worker injury

- Authors of the study point out that “**sick or stressed workers who continue to work are likely to take medications, experience sleep problems, or be fatigued.**”³ Under these fatigued and medicated conditions, workers are more likely to make dangerous misjudgments.

Workers need paid sick days to prevent worker contagion that can contribute to injury

- When workers are forced to report to work while ill, they are likely to spread that illness to co-workers, who in turn are put at a higher risk of injury.
- Workers who do not have access to paid sick days are **15 percent** more likely to be required to report to work while sick with a contagious illness like the flu or viral infection.⁴

Workers without paid sick days may not only injure themselves, but could injure others

¹ Ben-Ishai, Liz, “Businesses Can Avoid the High Cost of Workplace Injuries by Offering Earned Sick Days.” http://www.clasp.org/issues/pages?type=work_life_and_job_quality&id=0022.

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, Paid Sick Days: A Basic Labor Standard for the 21st Century, at page 39. <http://publicwelfare.org/Aboutus/documents/PollReportFINALa.pdf>

- Employees' lack of paid sick days is not only a danger to individual workers, but poses a significant public health risk as well.
- **79 percent** of workers involved in food production and service do not have access to paid sick days.⁵ A CDC study found that 20 percent of the **48 million cases of food-borne illness** annually can be traced back to transmissions from food workers.⁶
- Workers who are sick and operating machinery, administering medicine, or performing other sensitive tasks pose a danger to the general public.

Economic costs

- Workplace illnesses and injuries cost the U.S. economy a total of **\$250 billion** in healthcare services, lost earnings, and home production in 2007 alone.⁷
- In 2010, there were more than **1.7 million** illness and injury suffered by low-wage workers, incurring costs of more than **\$39 billion** dollars.⁸
- The cost of food-borne illness to our economy is about **\$152 million** a year.⁹
- Low-wage workers are also consumers; the money they spend in communities on local shops and services is vital to our economy.¹⁰
- The authors of the study concluded that "offering paid sick leave can be a **profit maximizing strategy**" when taking into account the costs of lost productivity, medical care, turnover, and workers compensation related to workplace injury.¹¹

Public Support

- **86 percent** of Americans believe that employers should be required by law to provide paid sick days to workers.¹²
- 89 percent of Americans believe that workplace safety regulations are a very important worker right.¹³
- Supporting paid sick days is **politically popular**. In a recent study, voters indicated that they are more likely to support a candidate who favors paid sick days by a margin of 35-36 percentage points.¹⁴

⁵ Ben-Ishai, Liz, "For Safe Food System, Workers Need Earned Sick Days."

http://www.clasp.org/issues/pages?type=work_life_and_job_quality&id=0023

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *CDC Estimates of Foodborne Illness in the United States* 2011.

http://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/PDFs/FACTSHEET_A_FINDINGS.pdf

⁷ Liz Borkowski and Celsete Monforton, *Mom's Off Work 'Cause She Got Hurt*, December 2012

⁸ Id.

⁹ Ben-Ishai, Liz, "For Safe Food System, Workers Need Earned Sick Days." *Supra*.

¹⁰ J. Paul Leigh, *Numbers and Costs of Occupational Injury and Illness in Low-Wage Occupations*, Center for Poverty Research, and Center for Health Care Policy, University of California Davis. December 2012.

¹¹ Ben-Ishai "Businesses Can Avoid the High Cost of Workplace Injuries by Offering Earned Sick Days." *Supra*.

¹² National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, *Paid Sick Days: A Basic Labor Standard for the 21st Century*, at page 7.

<http://publicwelfare.org/Aboutus/documents/PollReportFINALa.pdf>

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id at 8.