



Sick Days & Worker Safety

April 2013

Themes and Talking Points

Recent research confirming the connection between workplace safety and paid sick days has further clarified the need for modern, sensible labor standards. Common sense policies like 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.

Correlation 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 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 industries that suffer from a high number of worker safety problems, including construction and health care, do not offer paid sick days.

Workers need paid sick days to prevent injury on the job

- The study points out that “**sick or stressed workers who continue to work are likely to take medications, experience sleep problems, or be fatigued.**”³ Under these 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, placing their co-workers at higher risk of injury as well.
- Workers without access to paid sick days are **15 percent** more likely to be required to work while sick with a contagious illness like the flu or viral infection.⁴

Workers without paid sick days may also injure others

- Employees' lack of paid sick days poses a significant public health risk.
- **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 by food workers.⁶

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>

- 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 on services and at shops in their communities is vital to local economies.¹⁰
- The study concludes that “offering paid sick leave can be a **profit maximizing strategy**” when considering the high cost of lost productivity, medical care, turnover, and workers compensation related to workplace injury.¹¹

Public support

- **86 percent** of Americans believe 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.