

Paid Sick Days Will Improve The Health of All Milwaukee Residents

Fact Sheet - October 30, 2008



Paid sick days can reduce transmission of the flu:

- More than a third of flu cases are transmitted in schools and workplaces.
- Staying at home when infected could reduce the number of people impacted by pandemic influenza by 15%–34%.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends to “stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick.”

Paid sick days will make restaurants safer:

- Only 15% of U.S. workers in food preparation and services occupations have paid sick days, while over 80% of those in managerial and professional positions do.
- During a 5-year period (2003-2007), there were 3,187 reported cases of outbreak-related food-borne illnesses in Wisconsin, which led to 112 hospitalizations and 3 deaths. 93% of these cases occurred in public places where food was prepared or served by food workers, including restaurants, catered events, schools, recreational facilities, prisons, and nursing homes.
- In Milwaukee County alone, there were 302 reported cases of outbreak-related food-borne illnesses involving 9 hospitalizations during this period.
- Wisconsin Food Code Section 2-201.11 requires that “workers must be excluded or restricted from food preparation and service based on the signs and symptoms or a physician's diagnosis of an illness that can be transmitted through food.” Yet many restaurant workers can't take time off and still pay their rent. If they do take time off, many face disciplinary action.

“I can never imagine having paid sick days. It would have been a really good thing. No more sending kids to school really sick and just waiting on the school to call me back. And definitely not going in contaminating everyone else...I've basically just had to give up the luxury of work...There was no flexibility.”

- Milwaukee group focus participant

Paid sick days will reduce the likelihood of outbreaks of stomach flu in nursing homes:

- In 2007, there were 1641 cases of norovirus (stomach flu) infections in nursing homes in Wisconsin. 22 of these cases led to hospitalization and 2 to death.
- A study in New York found that the respiratory and gastrointestinal disease outbreak risk is significantly lower in nursing homes with paid sick day policies. Between 30 and 45 fewer California nursing homes would have norovirus outbreaks each year under a paid sick day policy.

Paid sick days will allow workers to care for their loved ones when they are sick:

- Parents who have paid time off are over 5 times more likely to care for children when they are sick.
- More than 1 in 3 families in the United States are likely to face 2 or more weeks of family illness each year.

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“There was a day where I actually had food poisoning...I couldn’t stop throwing up. I was very, very ill. There was just no way I could have gone in...So my manager actually had to come in and work when she wasn’t supposed to. And I got a very nasty letter the next time I came in to work and basically it was telling me when my review came that this would come up. It would probably be an issue. I might not get my raise because it was such short notice.” - Milwaukee focus group participant

Paid sick days will protect workers from income loss and the threat of job loss during periods of illness:

• *“I was sick two weeks...I just had to go to work. I was sick. My baby was sick, but you can’t lose the pay so I had to go. I didn’t have paid sick days or anything. I didn’t want to call in because if you call in sometimes you get wrote up or suspended. I don’t need that so I had to go. That’s how it’s been. I’ve been working there seven years, and I just go.”*

- Milwaukee focus group participant

• *“I went in for the early contractions which was causing my dehydration on my only day off that week... then you’re stuck with the hospital bill because you let the problem go on and blow up into this bigger situation rather than catch it earlier on so you end up losing money.” - Milwaukee focus group participant*

Americans who need paid sick days the most have the least access to them:

• 79% of U.S. workers with incomes in the bottom 25% do not have paid sick days. 38% of parents who live in poverty lack paid sick leave.

- Nationally, 40% of mothers whose children have asthma and 36% whose children have other chronic health conditions do not have paid sick days.
- 45% of California workers who rate their health as fair or poor do not have any paid sick days, while only 25% of workers who rate their health as excellent, very good, or good lack the benefit.

All workers in Milwaukee deserve paid sick days:

- There is no right to paid sick days in the United States. Only about half of all employees in the United States receive paid sick day benefits.
- 122,230 Milwaukee residents—47% of Milwaukee’s private-sector workforce—lack paid sick days.

Nearly half of Milwaukee workers in the private sector will benefit from the paid sick days ordinance if it is passed:

- Workers will earn one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours of paid work.
- Workers in firms with 10 or more employees will be able to take up to 72 hours of paid sick leave in a calendar year. Those in firms with fewer than 10 employees will be able to take up to 40 hours.
- Workers will be able to take paid sick time for their own illnesses or preventive health care, to recover from domestic abuse or sexual assault, or to care for family members who are sick.

The health of all Milwaukeeans would significantly benefit if workers earned paid sick days and used them when ill or when a family member needs care.