

Paid Leave Is Critical for Public Health

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THE PROBLEM

- **The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the devastating ripple effect that the lack of social support systems has on the health of workers, the health of our country and the economy.**
- Today, too many workers are forced to go to work sick, due to the lack of paid sick days and paid family and medical leave policies, putting themselves, their families, and the overall population at risk.
- It is our nation's essential workers who face a greater risk of exposure due to their interactions with the public at their jobs, yet they often lack access to paid sick days and paid leave protections.
- Because of our country's history of segregation and discrimination, people of color, women and low-income individuals hold these essential jobs, further reinforcing the deep systemic inequities that have resulted in these populations experiencing greater exposure, higher rates of death, and hospitalizations due to the virus.
- When a person is forced to go to work when they are sick — whether it's in a grocery store, at a child care center or at a restaurant — it is harder to contain the spread of illnesses and keep people safe and healthy.

THE SOLUTION

- **In the interest of public health, we should encourage workers to stay home when they are sick or need to care for a loved one, instead of penalizing them for making the decision to protect themselves and others.**
- As we work to recover and rebuild, we must address the social and economic inequities that impact the health and safety of individuals and families — whether it's housing, nutrition, access to affordable health care or workplace protections, including paid leave and paid sick days.

- We cannot afford to go back to the old normal of forcing workers to make the impossible choice between their financial security and their health.
- Congress must provide all workers access to paid leave and paid sick days during this pandemic and beyond by enacting the HEROES Act. Americans can't afford to wait.
- A thriving economy requires a healthy population and a healthy workforce.
- It's time for our leaders to prioritize protecting public health over protecting corporate profits.

VISUALIZATION

- **Workplace protections like paid leave and paid sick days will keep workers healthy, allow schools and workplaces to open more safely and with increased stability, and prevent the spread of COVID-19 and future pandemics.**
- A healthy economy depends on healthy workers.

BACKGROUND DATA POINTS

- Up to [106 million workers \(or 83 percent of working people\)](#) do not have emergency paid leave and paid sick days protections through their employer.
- More than [one-quarter](#) of private-sector workers — and 7 in 10 of the lowest-income workers — don't have access to even a single paid sick day.
- [32 million U.S. workers](#) don't have access to paid sick days.
- [Nearly half](#) (48 percent) of Latinx workers and more than one-third (36 percent) of Black workers report having no paid time away from work of any kind.
- People without paid sick days are [1.5 times more likely](#) than those with paid sick days to report going to work with a contagious illness like the flu or a viral infection.
- Nearly [one in four workers](#) have reported either losing a job or being threatened with job loss for needing to take a sick day.
- Workers who interact the most with the public are often the [least likely](#) to have paid sick days: The vast majority of people working in food service (81 percent) and at child care centers (75 percent) lack access to paid sick days. Workers in these occupations are also more likely to be exposed to contagious illnesses and, therefore, to spread illnesses to the public when they are forced to go to work sick.

- An estimated [one-third](#) of deaths during the COVID-19 crisis have occurred in long-term care and other congregate living facilities, More than 20 million of high-risk individuals, including older adults and [people with disabilities](#), need family support to shelter at home safely.
- Due to systemic racism, [people of color](#) are more likely to have higher rates of hospitalization or death from COVID-19. Black and American Indian / Alaska Native persons are 5 times more likely to be hospitalized than white Americans and Hispanic or Latino persons are approximately 4 times more likely to be hospitalized.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at NationalPartnership.org.

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