

# The Healthy Families Act

OCTOBER 2025

People should not have to make impossible choices between caring for their health and keeping a paycheck or job. Yet more than 25 million workers – 20 percent of the private sector workforce – cannot earn paid sick days.<sup>1</sup> Millions more workers cannot earn paid sick time they can use to care for a sick child or family member.<sup>2</sup> A growing number of states and cities are doing better, but it is long past time for all working families to have the job and economic security paid sick days provide.

## A Basic Workplace Standard

Sponsored by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT.), **the Healthy Families Act would set a national paid sick days standard – a critical step toward meeting the health and financial needs of working families.**

The Healthy Families Act would:

- Allow workers **to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year** to be used to recover from their own illnesses, access preventive care, provide care to a sick family member, or attend school meetings related to a child’s health condition or disability.
- 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.
- Include a **simple method for calculating accrued sick time**. Workers would earn a minimum of one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, up to 56 hours (seven days) per year, unless the employer selects a higher limit.
- **Allow employers to require certification** if an employee uses more than three paid sick days in a row. For survivors of domestic violence, the certification may be from a law enforcement officer or survivor advocate.
- **Allow employers to use 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, and give employers flexibility as to how they define a “year” for the purposes of sick time accrual.

## Benefits for Families, Businesses, Health and the Economy

A national paid sick days standard would help working families meet their health and financial needs while boosting businesses' productivity and retention rates and strengthening the economy.

- **Paid sick days provide families with economic security.** Nearly one-quarter of U.S. adults (23 percent) report they have lost a job or have been threatened with job loss for taking time off work due to illness or to care for a sick child or relative.<sup>3</sup> One-quarter to one-half of domestic violence survivors report losing a job in part due to the violence.<sup>4</sup> For a typical family without paid sick days, on average, 3.3 days of pay lost due to illness are equivalent to its entire monthly grocery budget.<sup>5</sup> Paid sick days laws enable workers to work more hours and reduce turnover<sup>6</sup> and increase women's employment and wages, especially among mothers and women without college degrees.<sup>7</sup>
- **Workers' and families' health suffer without paid sick days.** Workers without paid sick days are more likely to delay medical care<sup>8</sup> – including working cancer patients.<sup>9</sup> When they don't have paid sick days, workers are also more likely to report going to work with a contagious illness like the flu – and risk infecting others.<sup>10</sup> Parents without paid sick days are more than twice as likely as parents with paid sick days to send a sick child to school or day care.<sup>11</sup> Workers in jobs that require frequent contact with the public, including those in food preparation and service, personal home care and child care, are among the least likely to have paid sick days and the most likely to be unable to afford to take an unpaid day away from work.<sup>12</sup>
- **Paid sick days have been proven to benefit public health.** Paid sick days laws reduce mortality among working-age adults.<sup>13</sup> Workers with paid sick days are more likely to get preventive care, including cancer screenings,<sup>14</sup> flu vaccines<sup>15</sup> and dental care.<sup>16</sup> State and local paid sick days laws reduce the spread of flu,<sup>17</sup> and national emergency paid sick days through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) reduced the spread of COVID-19 by 15,000 cases per day.<sup>18</sup>
- **Paid sick days can decrease unnecessary health care costs.** Paid sick days laws are linked to a 5.6 percent reduction in emergency department visits, with the greatest reduction among Medicaid patients.<sup>19</sup> If all workers had paid sick days, 1.3 million emergency room visits could be prevented each year, saving \$1.1 billion annually. More than half of these savings – \$517 million – would go to taxpayer-funded health insurance programs such as Medicare and the State Children's Health Insurance Program.<sup>20</sup>

## Working Families Need the Healthy Families Act

**Paid sick days policies have been enacted successfully at the state and local levels and evidence shows they are working well, without adverse business or economic**

**effects, but America’s working families deserve a national standard.** Eighteen states, including the District of Columbia, and many more cities and counties nationwide have adopted paid sick days laws.<sup>21</sup> Seventy-seven percent of voters support a permanent paid sick days policy, including 67 percent of Republicans, 74 percent of Independents and 86 percent of Democrats.<sup>22</sup> Workers everywhere should have a fair shot at getting the care they need, caring for a child or assisting a parent. The Healthy Families Act would establish a much-needed national standard.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2025 (Private industry workers)*. See Technical Note for estimate of employees represented in survey. Retrieved 6 October 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ebs2.nr0.htm>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019, August 29). *Access to and Use of Leave Summary (Table 3: Workers with access to paid or unpaid leave and their ability to use leave by reason, averages for the period 2017-2018)*. Retrieved 6 October 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/leave.t03.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Smith, T. W., & Kim, J. (2010, June). *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences*. National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago for the Public Welfare Foundation Publication. Retrieved 6 October 2025, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/paid-sick-days-attitudes-and-experiences.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Hess, C., & Del Rosario, A. (2018). *Dreams Deferred: A Survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors’ Education, Careers, and Economic Security*. Retrieved 6 October 2025, from Institute for Women’s Policy Research website: <https://iwpr.org/dreams-deferred-a-survey-on-the-impact-of-intimate-partner-violence-on-survivors-education-careers-and-economic-security/>; U.S. General Accounting Office, Health, Education, and Human Services Division. (1998, November). *Domestic Violence: Prevalence and Implications for Employment among Welfare Recipients* (GAO/HEHS-99-12). Retrieved 6 October 2025, from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/hehs-99-12.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Gould, E., & Wething, H. (2023, November 2). *Paid sick leave access expands with widespread state action*. Economic Policy Institute Publication. Retrieved 6 October 2025, from <https://www.epi.org/publication/paid-sick-leave-2023/>

<sup>6</sup> Wething, H., & Slopen, M. (2024, February). *Labor Market Effects of Paid Sick Leave: The Case of Seattle*. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Retrieved 6 October 2025, from [https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1415&context=up\\_workingpapers](https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1415&context=up_workingpapers)

<sup>7</sup> Slopen, M. (2024, February). The impact of paid sick leave mandates on women’s employment and economic security. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 43(4), 1129-1151. doi: 10.1002/pam.22582

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<sup>11</sup> See note 3.

<sup>12</sup> Xia, J., Hayes, J., Gault, B., & Nguyen, H. (2016, February 17). *Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings*. Retrieved 6 October 2025, from Institute for Women’s Policy Research website: <https://iwpr.org/paid-sick-days-access-and-usage-rates-vary-by-race-ethnicity-occupation-and-earnings/>

<sup>13</sup> Kim, D. (2017, October). Paid Sick Leave and Risks of All-Cause and Cause-Specific Mortality among Adult Workers in the USA. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(10), 1247. doi: doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14101247; Wolf, D., A., Karas Montez, J., & Monnat, S. M. (2022, November). U.S. State Preemption Laws and Working-Age Mortality. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 63(5), 681-688. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2022.06.005

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