

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Advocates in Ohio are circulating petitions to ensure that all eligible employees in Ohio can earn paid sick days. The proposal requires most employers to permit full-time employees to earn up to seven paid sick days and part-time workers to earn sick days on a pro-rated basis. Sick days could be used if the worker or an immediate family member needed to recuperate from physical or mental illness or injury, or to obtain preventive care or medical treatment.

Current federal law does not require employers to provide workers any paid days off. The Family and Medical Leave Act requires large employers to offer unpaid time off for serious circumstances like the birth of a child, but does not cover routine absences. This contrasts sharply with every other advanced industrialized nation. All of the other twenty nations ranked most competitive have policies requiring that workers be given paid time off when sick. Nations far less prosperous than the U.S. also have this basic standard.

Providing paid sick days can mean better disease containment, faster recuperation and earlier treatment. For workplaces, this can mean that fewer employees actually get sick, duration of illnesses can be shortened, workers can be more productive and savings can result. Children also recover more quickly when their parents care for them.

Most U.S. and Ohio workers are able to earn some paid sick days. About 58 percent of Ohio employees can stay home from work when they are sick on occasion without losing pay or worrying about losing their job. Although being able to earn paid sick days is extremely important to workers, many workers use very few sick days. Half of those who have paid sick days do not miss a single day of work in a year. Workers covered by paid sick days miss an average of 3.9 days of work a year for their own illness or injury plus an estimated 1.7 days to care for sick family members or see the doctor.

Despite the modest use of this basic standard, 42 percent of Ohio employees do not have paid sick days. Thus, more than 2.2 million Ohio workers must work when ill or forego pay. Some workers may fear that taking a sick day can put their job in jeopardy.

Adults in families with children substantially increased their hours of work over the past generation, making it more likely that a sick child does not have a parent who is at home. Yet access to paid sick days has not increased and only 30 percent of workers can use paid sick days to care for sick children. This means more than 3.55 million Ohio workers would have to forego pay to care for a sick child.

Access to paid sick days varies by occupation, pay, and industry in Ohio. Coverage is low in some occupations that have extensive public contact, such as retail trade (less than half); arts, entertainment and recreation (just over one-third); and accommodation and food service (less than one quarter). These three sectors combined have more than 670,000 Ohio workers without sick days. This encourages working while sick.

Rates of coverage are also low in some physically demanding jobs that might be particularly difficult or unsafe to perform when injured or ill. For example, just 25 percent of construction workers have paid sick days, leaving more than 170,000 Ohio construction workers unprotected by this basic standard. Nearly half of manufacturing workers – almost 400,000 Ohioans – cannot earn paid sick days.

Other sectors offer much better rates of coverage, with six sectors providing paid sick days to more than two-thirds of workers. Even in these relatively well-covered sectors, however, more than 100,000 Ohio workers are still left with no paid sick days.

Public sector workers are more likely to have paid sick days. Virtually all U.S. government or Ohio state employees can earn paid sick days. County and city coverage is more mixed.

Coverage is lower in low-wage occupations. Thus, those who can least afford an unpaid day are most likely to have to forego pay or work while sick. Only 21 percent of workers with wages in the bottom 25 percent of wage rates have paid sick days.

Middle-class Ohio workers also need better sick day coverage. Nearly half of those earning between the 25th and 50th percentiles don't have sick days, and nearly 40 percent of those earning between the median and \$21.65 an hour (the 75th percentile) have no sick days. Even among the top quarter of earners, up to three in ten have no paid sick days.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research concludes that providing paid sick days in Ohio would yield a net savings of more than \$1.00 per worker per week, from reduced spread of illness, reduced turnover, and a healthier workforce.

In addition to the Ohio action, a recently-introduced federal bill would provide paid sick days. Paid sick day legislation was introduced in 11 states this year and was passed in the city of San Francisco. In seven states, the law now says that employees can use sick days and other types of leave to care for ill family members.

A paid sick day standard would be good for Ohio. This policy would reduce the spread of disease, encourage preventive care and recovery, allow parents to be with sick children, and improve worker well-being. The cost is extremely modest and the savings exceed the costs. Most workers won't even take a sick day in a typical year, but having this basic standard will enable them to take this time when they need to. An economy as prosperous as ours, in which parents are expected to work, requires that we provide workers with the basic flexibility that allows them to manage their lives and their health.