

## Paid sick days critically important for family financial security



The absence of paid sick days can force ill workers to decide between either caring for their health or losing their jobs. Nearly forty million workers nationwide lack access to paid sick days for their own illness, and millions more do not have access to paid sick days when their child, spouse or a close relative is sick or needs preventive medical care. *The Need for Paid Sick Days*, co-authored by EPI's director of Health Policy Research Elise Gould, argues that access to paid sick time is an important tool for providing economic security to working families, particularly in this economic downturn.

“The lack of a national paid sick days standard reflects a bygone era when only one parent worked. This paper shows workers need a safety net that meets the changing needs of the modern workforce,” said Gould.

### NEWS FROM EPI

**FOR IMMEDIATE  
RELEASE  
Tuesday,  
May 31, 2011**

According to a recent survey, 16% of workers say they or a family member have been fired, suspended or otherwise punished, or that they would be fired, if they missed work due to illness. That's a harsh penalty in an economy where there are 4.6 workers for every job opening.

The report points out that workers with the fewest economic resources are the least likely to have access to paid sick days. The median wage for workers without paid sick days is \$10 an hour, compared to \$19 for workers who do have it.

### CONTACT

Phoebe Silag or  
Karen Conner  
202-775-8810  
[news@epi.org](mailto:news@epi.org)

Working families need access to paid sick time that can also be used when a child or family member is sick. As baby boomers reach old age, more working families take care of older family members in addition to children. Almost 1 out of 5 workers provide care for someone over the age of 50.

Employers that do not provide paid sick time must bear the cost of the lost productivity that results— a cost that may well exceed the cost of providing paid sick days. Also, by not providing paid sick time, employers pass on costs to hospitals. In 2006, nearly 4.4 million hospital admissions in the U.S., totaling \$30.8 billion in hospital costs, could have been prevented with timely and effective ambulatory care or adequate patient self-management of the condition.

But working families bear the full weight of the “sick penalty” beyond just lost wages. Forty percent of working mothers with asthmatic children have no paid sick time. Asthma is one of the most common chronic conditions among children, and if left untreated, may result in hospitalization.

“This report underscores the grave harm caused by the failure to allow workers in this country to earn paid sick days. Workers who lack job-protected paid sick days are most at risk of financial devastation because they must sacrifice their paychecks or even risk their jobs when they get sick,” explained Vicki Shabo, director of work and family programs at the National Partnership for Women & Families, which leads a national paid sick days coalition of more than 150 national, state and local organizations. “Too often these

workers are forced to go to work sick or to send a sick child to school or daycare because they cannot miss a paycheck. This means workers or their children get sicker, business costs rise and contagion spreads in our communities. It's a situation that simply doesn't make sense."

###

*The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that researches the impact of economic trends and policies on working people in the United States and around the world. EPI's mission is to inform people and empower them to seek solutions that will ensure broadly shared prosperity and opportunity.*