

# 10 Things That Could Happen to You if You Didn't Have Paid Sick Days



And the Best Way to Make Sure They Never Happen to Anyone



# **10 Things that Could Happen to You If You Didn't Have Paid Sick Days**

*And the Best Way to Make Sure  
They Never Happen to Anyone*



**By 9to5, National Association of Working Women**

*To obtain more copies of this booklet, share stories, and help support paid sick days, email 9to5's Activist Network at [activist@9to5.org](mailto:activist@9to5.org) or call 1-800-522-0925. For more information on 9to5, check out [www.9to5.org](http://www.9to5.org)*

# **10 Things that Could Happen to You If You Didn't Have Paid Sick Days And the Best Way to Make Sure They Never Happen to Anyone**

Most people believe that workers in the US have the right to paid sick days. Yet, incredibly, almost half of full-time, private-sector workers have NONE. The figures are even worse for low-wage workers - 3 in 4 - and part-timers - five in six have NO paid sick days.

The following stories are from a sample of 9to5 members who needed a paid sick day and couldn't get it. They illustrate the many real consequences to workers and their families when workers lack realistic flexibility. Without paid sick time, here's what could happen to you:

## **1. You lose your job.**

### **When your child is injured**

*When my son got hit by a car, he didn't tell me right away, because he was worried I would lose my job. An older child called me at work and said, "Mom, Eric's crying. He got hit by a car. You have to come home." I told my boss, who said I'd be fired if I left. I knew my child had to go to the emergency room, so I left anyway - and I was fired. The x-ray showed Eric had a broken arm.*

*- Robbie Bickerstaff, Wisconsin*

### **When you go to the doctor**

*I worked for a temp agency that placed me with a factory. After a year of working there full-time as a parts tucker they decided to hire me as a permanent worker, but I wasn't given any paid sick days for three more months. Then one day I got really sick with a high fever and I became dehydrated. I was rushed to the emergency room and got hooked up to an IV. The next day I wanted to go back to work but my doctor said I was too contagious.*

*I was so worried I'd get fired that I went back anyway. I was still sick and nearly passed out, so I had to leave. I was fired. For over a year until then, I had reported to work and never missed a day.*

*- Tiffany Haney, Georgia*

## **2. You can't take care of a parent.**

### **When your parent is laid up**

*My husband is a veteran and is now bedridden. He has some health workers' assistance but we cannot afford to have someone come in to care for him all the time. I myself do a lot to help him when he needs a change of bedpan or when he needs to eat. He is 6'5" and nearly 300 lbs. So I can't lift him to a chair or anywhere else he wants to go in the house.*

*My son can lift him. He once took a couple of days off to help me care for my husband, and then he lost his job. He had no paid sick days.*

*- Olina Potts, California*

## **3. You can't take care of a partner.**

### **When your spouse needs surgery**

*I was working for over 20 years as an accounts receivable specialist. I requested all my vacation dates at the start of the year and although I worked full-time, I have no paid sick time to care for my spouse.*

*Then we found out my spouse had a tumor and needed brain surgery. He would be home for months and financially it meant we couldn't count on his income like we used to. I had access to family and medical leave but it was unpaid and I had to pay for food, our mortgage, and gas.*

*A few paid sick days would have meant I could have afforded to spend more time with him in the ICU. It would have created more financial security, less emotional stress, and a better recovery.*

*- Mary Pampuch, Minnesota*

## **4. You're forced to go on public assistance.**

### **When your child needs help recovering**

*I had a job I liked and was getting by as a landscaper. Then my son was hit by a hit-and-run driver. I asked for time off to be with my child, but I was told I couldn't have any. I felt like I was asked to make a choice between my job and my child. Seeing no other alternative, I helped my child recover. I was forced to go on public assistance and only received food stamps.*

*As a single mother I feel that I have multiple barriers to survive. If I had had paid time off I would not be in the predicament I'm in now.*

*- Tammera Bravo, Colorado*

## **5. Your older child has to miss school to care for a younger sibling.**

### **When a younger sibling is sick**

*I was teaching at a high school in San Jose. Many of my students were absent from my classes. One day I asked a student why he was gone the day before. He told me that he had to take care of his sick two-year old brother. When I asked why his parents didn't take care of his sick brother so he could come to school, he said his Mom would lose her job. I then realized that there were many days when my students' family obligations kept them out of school.*

*- Cathy Deppe, California*

## **6. You must take a sick child to work or lose needed pay.**

### **When you have no one to help**

*I am currently working at a job without paid sick days. I have a 5 year-old daughter. I have had to take her to work when she was sick. It's so difficult to get anything done.*

*At a recent job, I had to take unpaid time to care for my daughter. When I came back, I was called into the office and told that I needed to decide whether I wanted to work there or if I wanted to "be a mom." Who's going to care for a sick child when you have no family to help? Financially we were struggling, but because I stayed home with my sick daughter, I was placed on a two-day suspension.*

*- Tina Orth, Wisconsin*

## **When your child has the flu**

*I have two daughters and my youngest is five. When she had the flu, I had to get her from school and find a babysitter. Finding a babysitter who will care for your sick child is hard and expensive. Although I got that day off, it was financially hard to miss pay. The next day I went to work, but I also lost my pay because I had to pay the babysitter as much as I made that day. I was finally dismissed from that job for caring for my daughter when she was sick.*

*Somebody has got to stay home with a sick child; otherwise that sickness will just go around in the school. My daughter has got strep throat twice this year. I would love to have paid sick days so that when my child is too sick to go to school, I can take care of her and keep my job.*

*- Edith Clark, New Jersey*

## **7. You have to leave your sick kid alone or waiting.**

### **When she is sick at school**

*I am 15 years old. I don't have a job yet, but when I do I hope I'll have paid sick days. Once when I was little I got real sick at school. I waited and waited but Mom never came. I couldn't ride the bus so the Principal had to drive me home and wait with me for my Mom. I felt terrible. I thought my Mom didn't love me as much as her job. When my Mom finally made it home she was crying more than I was. She told me her boss would not let her leave. My Mom was fired because her boss thought I might get sick again!*

*-Jennetta Allen, Georgia*

### **When he is sick at daycare**

*Working in a day care center, I saw parents unable to care for their sick children. The day care centers were unaware of whom to contact if children were sick, since no one could pick up the sick child. My son was in a care center one floor below mine. When I went to check on him one day during my lunch break, he was sitting on the floor shivering with a temperature over 100 degrees. My boss said I could lose my job if I left to take him to the doctor.*

*I couldn't believe that at a place where we are supposed to care for children, I might lose my job for my own child. I worked in a place with 15 people, so I did not even qualify for the Family Medical Leave Act, and had no job protection.*

*- Stacey Calvin, Georgia*

## 8. Your child goes to school sick.

### **When kids send themselves to school sick**

*I've never told my mother this before but kids know everything. We hear everything. Now I'm 21, but when I was in grade school and feeling sick, I'd wonder whether I should tell my mom. Would we have groceries this week if she had to stay home with me? Lots of times I just went ahead to school when I was really feeling sick.*

- Carissa Peppard, New Jersey

## 9. Your health comes last.

### **When you have a baby**

*I am a single mother of two and I've had a lot of jobs, almost none of which offered sick days or any benefits. My current job has been one I've been able to keep for a few years, but I've made a lot of sacrifices just to keep it. For instance, when my son was born I didn't have any maternity leave or any sick days. Without sick days, I just had to wait until the day I went into labor to stop working. I only missed two days but the whole time I was worried that I was going to get fired.*

-Debra Wade, Indiana

## **10. You're forced to put the public's health at risk.**

### **When you get the flu**

*I was working at a fast-food restaurant for over three years full-time. I started when I was just 17 and was working close to 50 hours a week from the beginning. I never had any paid sick time after three years of working there. Once I started to feel sick and began vomiting, I told my supervisor I needed to leave but they said I couldn't go. I know that's against safety violations, but they told me I had to finish my shift, which was until 4AM. I was so sick and exhausted, but I still had to serve food.*

*When I finally got to a doctor, they told me I had the flu and needed to get rest immediately. While I was getting worse, every customer I served was exposed to that winter's flu virus.*

*- Connie Smith, Wisconsin*

### **When you and your coworkers have to drive sick**

*I am a school bus driver and a mother. I drove children to school for six years without having any paid sick days. When my own children had a common cold or an ear infection, I would have to take an unpaid day to take care of them. That created financial crisis in my household. When it came to my own personal health, I often worked with migraines because I couldn't afford to miss days.*

*I know drivers who had to go to work with untreated diabetes symptoms, knowing they might have a seizure. Employers who don't provide paid sick days are really putting lives at risk. The workers at my bus company organized and won a union election. We're happy about that but we know that all workers deserve paid sick days.*

*- Kimberly Miller, Wisconsin*

## **Make change, guarantee sick days: Support the Healthy Families Act**

Senator Kennedy and Representative DeLauro introduced The Healthy Families Act (S.2520, H.R.4575) on June 17, 2004, to guarantee a minimum of number of paid sick days to all workers in firms of 15 or more. The bill would provide seven paid sick days a year to full-time workers and is pro-rated for part-timers. It would cover employees who work at least 20 hours per week or 1000 hours annually.

Paid sick days could be used to care for your own illness or physical or mental condition, to obtain a medical diagnosis, a related treatment, or preventive care, or to care for a family member for any of the aforementioned reasons.

Employees who request at least 3 consecutive days may need doctor's certification (further certification may be requested at employer expense.)

Employers are required to post notice of the availability of paid sick days and how to file enforcement action. Employers may not prevent, interfere with or deny the exercise of (or the attempt to exercise) the employee's right to paid sick days. They also may not discriminate against an employee for taking or requesting this time. Employers must make, keep, and preserve records on compliance with HFA. Employers must keep health information confidential and separate from personnel files.

Employers with comparable or better policies won't have to modify them. HFA expressly preserves state or local laws providing greater paid sick time benefits and encourages employers to provide greater benefits.



*Atlanta 9to5 joins nationwide events to celebrate  
Healthy Families Act introduction, June 2004*

# Don't Make Us Choose Between Our Families and a Paycheck

## The Facts:

Almost half (47%) of full-time, private-sector workers have NO paid sick days. Only one in six part-time workers has paid sick days. Workers who do have paid days can't always use it to take care of a sick child or elderly relative.

Lower wage workers are particularly vulnerable. More than three in four (76%) workers in the bottom quarter in earnings have no paid sick days. More than 4 in 10 (41%) of working parents with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line have no paid leave of any kind. Low-wage workers with more than two years job tenure are no more likely to receive paid leave than those who worked less than a year. Recent welfare recipients fare the worst.

This is not just an issue for families with children. Nearly 4 in 10 employees already report that they have missed work due to elder care responsibilities. This number is likely to grow higher, as nearly two-thirds of Americans under age 60 expect to be responsible for the care of an elderly relative by 2008.

The problem is particularly acute for working women, who are still predominantly responsible for meeting family caregiving needs. Almost half (49%) of working mothers report that they must miss work when a child is sick. Of these mothers, 49% do not get paid when that happens. According to a recent study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, employers have been reducing their sick leave programs.

## The Consequences:

Lack of paid sick days means more than a loss of pay - it often means discipline, up to and including termination. That can affect workers long-term, making it harder to get another job, causing a wait for needed benefits, hurting the development of assets and retirement security.

Other consequences of inadequate coverage include adverse health effects for workers, contagion among co-workers, reduced productivity, higher costs of turnover, worse health outcomes for children, and increased use of health care resources.

# **Paid Sick Days will Help Solve Ailments of Workplaces and the Community**

## **Benefits for Business**

A minimum amount of paid sick leave levels the playing field for covered employers and will have no impact on companies that already provide paid sick leave. According to a 2001 study published in the Journal of Managerial Issues, offering workers the option of taking time off when a family member is sick affects profits positively.

Studies show that welfare leavers and other low-income workers have high rates of job churning, often because of family care responsibilities. The costs of losing an employee (advertising for, interviewing and training a replacement) are far greater than the cost of providing short-term leave to retain existing employees. Deloitte and Touche LLP, for example, estimate savings of \$41.5 million a year in such costs as a result of their flexibility programs. This holds true for low-income employees as well as highly paid and skilled professionals.

44% of HR executives say that "presenteeism" - employees coming to work even though they are ill, which poses potential problems of contagion and lower productivity - is a problem. A recent Cornell study states that presenteeism costs \$180 billion annually in lost productivity and may cost employers more than absenteeism due to illness.

A number of studies have found that businesses that provide flexible leave policies for workers benefit from higher morale, reduced absenteeism, and lower turnover and training costs. A 2002 study by economists from the University of Chicago estimated that employers in California would save \$89 million a year in turnover costs through a paid family leave program.

## **Benefits for Children**

Children are healthier and more successful in school when a parent is able to attend school meetings and stay home when the child is sick. Jody Heymann found that half of the parents of children scoring in the bottom quartile on math and reading tests were or had recently been in jobs without any paid leave. A number of medical studies have found that children recover more quickly when a parent is present, thus saving on health care costs.

## **Benefits for the Community**

Regular medical care saves money by preventing illness and injury and decreasing the need for emergency care. These savings benefit public and private payers of health insurance, including private businesses.

# Organizations that Support the Healthy Families Act

9to5 is part of the Healthy Families Act Coalition. Organizations in this coalition include:

AFL-CIO  
American Association of University Women  
The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)  
The American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO  
Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation  
Children’s Defense Fund  
Coalition for Human Needs  
Communication Workers of America  
Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
DC Employment Justice Center Families USA  
I Am Your Child Foundation  
Massachusetts Paid Leave Coalition  
NAACP  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Education Association  
National Employment Law Project (NELP)  
National Family Caregivers Association

National Organization for Women  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National PTA  
National Urban League  
National Women’s Law Center  
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby Paper, Allied Industrial, Chemical & Energy Workers International Union (PACE)  
Pennsylvania Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project  
RESULTS  
UNITE!  
United Steelworkers of America Women Employed  
9to5, National Association of Working Women



## **About 9to5, National Association of Working Women**

In 1973 a group of office workers in Boston got together to talk about issues which had no name—sexual harassment, work/family challenges, and pay equity. From this beginning 9to5 emerged as the national organization dedicated to putting working women’s issues on the public agenda. 9to5’s constituents are low-wage women, women in traditionally female jobs, and those who’ve experienced any form of discrimination. Membership is open to all. Now in its fourth decade, 9to5’s mission is to strengthen women’s ability to win economic justice.

To obtain more copies of this booklet, share stories, and help support paid sick days, contact 9to5’s Activist Network at 1-800-522-0925 or email [activist@9to5.org](mailto:activist@9to5.org)

For more information on 9to5, check out [www.9to5.org](http://www.9to5.org)