



New Jersey Time to Care Coalition

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## **Earned Sick Days for NJ Workers An Important Tool to Improve Public Health**

**Nearly 1.2 million New Jerseyans do not have access to any earned sick days. These workers are more likely to go to work sick, delaying their own recovery and putting the health of their co-workers and the general public at risk.<sup>1</sup>**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that workers stay home from work when sick with common illnesses like the flu. Workers without access to earned sick days don't have that option and we all risk getting sick.<sup>2</sup>
- Staying at home when infected could reduce by 15–34% the proportion of people impacted by pandemic influenza. Without preventative strategies, more than 71,000 people in New Jersey could die in a serious pandemic flu outbreak.
- With earned sick days, workers with chronic illnesses may avoid hospitalization by managing their health through outpatient care.<sup>3</sup> Paid sick days enable workers to take the necessary time off for such preventative and diagnostic care, working to lower the cost of health care. Approximately 13% of hospital visits are considered preventable and can be avoided with early intervention care.<sup>9</sup>

**Jobs that require frequent contact with the public are unlikely to provide earned sick days.**

- 76% of food service and hotel workers in New Jersey don't have a single paid sick day. Workers in child care centers, retail and nursing homes also overwhelmingly lack earned sick days.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly half of stomach "flu"-related outbreaks caused by the norovirus are linked to ill food-service workers. An outbreak of norovirus occurred at a restaurant in Kent, Ohio in 2008 when a worker had no choice but to come to work sick. As a result, over 500 people became violently ill and the outbreak cost the community between \$130,233 and \$305,337. Each year, there are approximately 76 million cases of food-borne illness in the U.S.<sup>5</sup>
- In nursing home, earned sick days policies were associated with significantly lower risk of respiratory and gastrointestinal disease outbreaks in nursing homes in a New York State study. Between 30 and 45 California nursing homes would be spared norovirus outbreaks each year under a earned sick day policy.<sup>9</sup>

*"Providing families with time to care means strong families, strong workplaces, and strong communities."*



### **Earned sick days will reduce unnecessary hospital visits**

- Among workers with health insurance, those without earned sick days are 15% more likely to use the emergency room and almost 40% more likely to delay necessary medical care relative to those with paid sick days. Research indicates that just under half of New Jersey's 3,000,000 emergency department visits are "either avoidable or treatable outside of the ED...and are amendable to primary care."<sup>9</sup>
- 13% of hospital visits are avoidable with necessary primary care.<sup>9</sup>

### **Earned sick days will allow working parents to care for their children when they become sick**

- Child care centers require sick children to stay home to prevent the spread of illness. The CDC recommends keeping children home from school for 24 hours after their fevers subside to prevent the spread of illness.<sup>6</sup> Working parents with paid time off are 5 times more likely to stay home with their sick children than those without paid time off.<sup>7</sup>
- Children get well faster when a parent cares for them,<sup>8</sup> reducing health-care costs.
- Between 2006-2009, there were 84 influenza (including H1N1) and influenza-like outbreaks in New Jersey. Of these, over 80% occurred in long-term care facilities, and the rest occurred in schools, day cares, jails, and other locations.<sup>9</sup>

The best available public health evidence demonstrates that the guarantee of paid sick days for all would have significant positive public health impacts. Guaranteed paid sick days would reduce the spread of pandemic and seasonal flu; reduce emergency room usage; protect the public from diseases carried by sick workers in restaurants and nursing homes; and enable workers to stay home when they are sick or need to care for a sick dependent. Paid sick days could also prevent hunger and homelessness among sick, low-income workers and increase the use of primary or preventative care.<sup>9</sup>

**It's time our legislature guaranteed earned sick days for all in to promote a healthier workforce and healthier New Jersey!!!**

**For more information or to get involved with the  
NJ Time to Care Coalition's campaign for earned sick days contact:  
New Jersey Citizen Action, 973.643.8800  
Center for Women and Work, Rutgers University, 848.932.0081**

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<sup>1</sup> Human Impact Partners, “A Health Impact Assessment of Paid Sick Days: New Jersey Addendum April 2011.” Available at <http://www.humanimpact.org/component/jdownloads/finish/5/121/0>.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Taking Care of Yourself When You Have Seasonal Flu*, [www.cdc.gov/flu/takingcare.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/takingcare.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, *Preventable Hospitalizations: Window into Primary and Preventative Care*, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Testimony of Heidi Hartmann, Institute for Women’s Policy Research, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Policy Matters Ohio, *Outbreak in Ohio: Cost of the 2008 Norovirus Incident in Kent*, <http://www.policymattersohio.org/OutbreakInOhio2008.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The Flu*, [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/2007-08/text/parents\\_guide\\_508.rtf](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/2007-08/text/parents_guide_508.rtf).

<sup>7</sup> S. J. Heyman, S. Toomey, and F. Furstenberg, “Working Parents: What Factors are Involved in Their Ability to Take Time Off From Work When Their Children Are Sick?,” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 153 (August 1999): 870-874.

<sup>8</sup> S. Jody Heymann, Alison Earle, and Brian Egleston, “Parent Availability for the Care of Sick Children,” *Pediatrics* 98 (August 1996): 226-230.

<sup>9</sup> Human Impact Partners, “A Health Impact Assessment of Paid Sick Days: New Jersey Addendum April 2011.” Available at <http://www.humanimpact.org/component/jdownloads/finish/5/121/0>.

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