



GET THE PRESCRIPTION:

**CHILD CARE WORKERS
NEED PAID SICK DAYS**

July 2006

Background

About half of private sector workers in the United States are unable to get paid for a day they can not work because they are sick or they are caring for someone who gets sick. For child care workers, having paid time off for sick days is a particularly important public policy issue because:

- Child care workers are typically low paid workers so taking time off from work without pay is financially difficult;
- Child care workers who come to work with a cold or other communicable illness can make their colleagues sick and may also make children sick;
- Child care workers who care for children are at risk of picking up childrens' illnesses. If sick children are sent to child care because their parents do not have paid sick days, this increases the likelihood of workers getting ill.
- Child care settings typically have policies that tell parents to keep their child at home if the child is ill; if parents are financially forced to do try and send their sick child to care, this places an additional burden on already stretched child care workers and could put other children at risk.

Legislation has been introduced in Congress and some states and localities are considering policies that would set a minimum standard for paid sick days. For example, the Congressional bill, the Healthy Families Act, would provide for 7 paid sick days as a minimum standard for full time workers; part time workers who work at least 20 hours would receive a pro-rata amount. Firms with fewer than 15 employees would not be obligated to meet the federal minimum standard. Firms which already met the minimum standard would not need to do anything further.

Child care workers are typically low paid workers and can't afford unpaid time off:

- Child care workers have one of the lowest wage rates of any occupation. According to the Center for the Childcare Workforce, “only 18 occupations out of 770 surveyed by the BLS reported having lower mean wages than child care workers. Those who earned higher wages included service station attendants, bicycle repairers and locker room attendants.”ⁱ

Child care workers rarely receive paid sick days from their employers:

- Nationally, three of every four workers in the lowest wage quartile have jobs that do not provide paid sick days; this happens because employers decide whether to provide or not to provide paid sick days to employees; employers tend to provide paid sick days to workers with higher wages.ⁱⁱ
- While there is a lack of national or state data on the percent of child care workers with and without paid sick days, some states have conducted surveys. For example, in Iowa about half of center care assistants and 4 of 10 teachers were without paid sick days.ⁱⁱⁱ

“as is often said, the best social program is having a good job”

Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk
Allied Drive Early Childhood Initiative March 2004^{iv}

If child care workers go to work sick they can infect colleagues and children:

- Paid sick days minimize the spread of the flu. Research indicates that workers sick with the flu are likely to infect 1.8 of every 10 co-workers. Forty percent of workers report having contracted the flu from a colleague according to the Institute for Women’s Policy and Research.^v

Many workers who currently have no paid sick days have the most frequent exposure to the public: workers in food service, nursing homes, child care centers, and retail clerks. We will all be healthier, and workplaces will be more productive and efficient, when workers gain the basic right to time to maintain our society’s health.

Vicky Lovell, Institute for Women’s Policy Research
Massachusetts Legislature May 2005

Pre-school and school age children are frequently ill:

- The National Association for Sick Child Daycare found that more than 350,000 of the nation's children under age 14 who have two working parents are too sick to attend school or child care each day.^{vi}
- The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Public Health Association identified over 10 common conditions which should trigger keeping a sick child out of day care; these conditions range from pink eye and coughing to diarrhea. The Academy also notes that one of the three key reasons to keep a child at home is that “The child requires more care than program staff is able to provide without effecting the health and safety of the other children.”^{vii}
- Children less than five years of age experience an average of 3.3 episodes of diarrhea annually; school age children with acute and chronic conditions lose an average of 4.5 days according to 1994 data.^{viii}
- Children who are ill fare better when their parents are able to be involved. The worse the working conditions a parent faces, the less likely the child will be cared for by the parent. Parents with paid leave are at least 5 times more likely to care for their sick children than those without paid leave according to a city level study.^{ix}

More than any other sector, it is perhaps the people who provide child care and education—and the children themselves—who are affected by employers’ decisions NOT to provide paid sick leave.

Ruth A Schmidt, Executive Director
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
Letter to Madison Common Council, 2006

For more information contact: Jodie Levin-Epstein at jodie@clasp.org

ENDNOTES

ⁱ <http://www.ccw.org/pubs/2004Compendium.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B250.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/SP222.pdf>

^{iv} http://www.co.dane.wi.us/exec/pdf/eci_concept_paper.pdf

^v <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B250.pdf>

^{vi} <http://www.nascd.com/>

^{vii} <http://www.denvergov.org/PHI/template312251.asp>

^{viii} <http://www.vrp.com/art/549.asp>

^{ix} Heymann, Jody, *The Widening Gap: Why America’s Working Families Are in Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It*. P. 58 (Basic Books, 2000).