



AN INITIATIVE OF

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FAST FACTS



Earned Sick Leave

"That means our most vulnerable people, those working our lowest wage jobs, have to choose between getting well, getting food on the table or caring for a sick child. When the rubber hits the road, people have no choice but to go to work when they're sick or send their sick child to school."

— Pittsburgh City Councilwoman
Natalia Rudiak

CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, provides leaders with a package of nine evidence-based policy solutions that have the potential to help millions of people live longer, better lives in vibrant, prosperous communities. One of these policy solutions is earned sick leave, which reduce the spread of contagious illnesses, increase employment and income stability, and can save cities money in health care costs.

What are earned sick leave policies?

Earned sick leave ordinances require employers within a jurisdiction to allow people to take time off for illness or injury for themselves, and other family members, such as spouses, domestic partners, children, or their parents. Workers can use this time to stay home or to see a doctor until they are healthy enough to work again, without concern for lost wages or job loss.

How do earned sick leave policies improve the lives of city residents?

FIGHT CONTAGIOUS DISEASES. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, three in ten people who work in the private sector—and 70 percent of those with the lowest wages—do not have earned sick days to care for their own health.¹ People without earned sick days are 1.5 times more likely to go to work with contagious illnesses like the flu or a viral infection,² three times more likely to forgo medical care for themselves, and 1.6 times more likely to forgo medical care for their families,³ than those with earned sick days. This puts everyone at risk. For example, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 70 percent of foodborne transmission of norovirus is due to infected food workers.⁴

REDUCE WORKPLACE ILLNESS. By allowing people to take time off when they are sick, we reduce the spread of infectious diseases—especially for people who work in the food industry or care for children or the elderly. In fact, according to research published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, access to earned sick days reduces flu infections in the workplace by nearly six percent.⁵ Providing earned sick leave could have saved employers as much as \$1.88 billion per year in absenteeism costs from flu-like illnesses.⁶

INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY. Earned sick days help reduce “presenteeism”—the productivity lost when employees work sick—which is estimated to cost our national economy \$160 billion annually.⁷ The US Department of Labor finds earned sick time promotes employment and income stability, which is a key component of economic growth.⁸

PROTECT LOWER-INCOME POPULATIONS. When Seattle required earned sick leave for all workers, the biggest increases in coverage were for part-time and lower-income workers, particularly those working in the hospitality industry.⁹ Another study found that low income workers without earned sick leave were the most likely to forgo medical care for themselves or their families.³

What is the evidence that earned sick leave policies work?

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's What Works for Health database cites expert opinion that earned sick days improve access to health care and health outcomes for individuals and the wider population. According to the US Department of Labor, earned sick leave protects people from losing income and employment, and ensures workers take the time to get medical care for themselves and their children when they are ill.⁸ Evidence shows that access to earned sick leave is associated with:

- Greater use of physician services, including cancer screenings, and reduced reliance on emergency room visits when health problems go untreated;^{10,11}
- Increased job stability and the likelihood that low income parents take leave when their children have health problems;^{12,13}
- In the case of lack of access to earned sick leave, increased risk of illness for individuals and the spread of contagious illness among the wider population.⁵

According to evidence from the Institute for Women's Policy Research, if all US employees had earned sick leave, it would reduce emergency room visits by an estimated \$1.3 million a year, saving \$1.1 billion in medical costs annually.¹⁴

What is the evidence that businesses support earned sick leave policies?

Studies have shown that in cities and states that have implemented earned sick days, business owners are

supportive of the policy and report that the costs are nonexistent or minimal.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ A year and a half after implementation of Connecticut's earned sick days law, three-quarters of surveyed employers expressed support for the policy, and most reported a modest or no impact on their costs and business operations. According to a study by the city auditor of Seattle, 70 percent of business owners favored the city's earned sick leave law one year after it was implemented.¹⁸

What are some future policy issues to consider?

Cities looking to boost residents' health and well-being are considering not only earned sick leave policies, but also earned family leave, which allows working women and men to take time off to care for a child or other immediate relatives. According to the US Department of Labor Statistics, only 13 percent of US private sector workers—and 4 percent of private sector workers with the lowest wages—have access to earned family leave through their employers.¹⁹ According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's County Health Rankings and Roadmaps project, earned family leave is linked to reduced infant mortality, increased rates of breastfeeding, and improved child and family health and well-being overall.²⁰

RESOURCES FOR CITIES ON EARNED SICK LEAVE POLICIES

CDC-TWH Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—Total worker health.

Better Workplaces, Better Businesses National listing of businesses that support public policies to improve workplaces; includes model legislation.

Grassroots Change Grassroots Change. Connecting for better health.

FVW-Paid sick days Paid sick days wins. Family Values at Work (FVW).

Paid Sick Days Campaign National Partnership for Women and Families' compilation of research and policy relating to paid sick leave.

A Better Balance Source for model legislation, policy developments, and research on paid sick leave policies, including **this comparison chart** of policies at the state and local level.

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CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, works to advance a package of evidence-based policy solutions that will help millions of people live longer, better lives in vibrant, prosperous communities.

CityHealth will regularly evaluate cities on the number and strength of their policies. <http://www.cityhealth.org/>