

# 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.””**

-Councilwoman [Natalia Rudiak](#)



## WHAT ARE EARNED SICK LEAVE POLICIES?

Earned sick leave ordinances require employers within a set jurisdiction to allow people to take time off for illness or injury for themselves, their children or their parents. Working men and women 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 BIG CITY RESIDENTS?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, one in three people who work in the private sector — and one in four of people who are earned the lowest-wages — do not have earned sick days to care for their own health. People **without earned sick days are 1.5 times more likely** than those with earned sick days to report going to work with contagious illnesses like the flu or a viral infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **70 percent of foodborne transmission of norovirus is due to infected food workers.**

By allowing people to take time off when they are sick, we reduce the spread of infectious disease—an especially important issue 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 the spread of the flu** in the workplace by nearly six percent.

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

---

## WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE THAT EARNED SICK LEAVE POLICIES WORK?

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundations' 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 lost income and employment, and ensures workers take the time to get medical care for themselves and their children when they are ill. Evidence shows that access to earned sick leave is associated with:

Greater use of physician services ([Peipins 2012](#), [Cook 2011](#)), including cancer screenings ([Peipins 2012](#)), and reduced reliance on emergency room visits when health problems go untreated. According to evidence cited by DOL, if all US employees had paid sick time, it would [reduce emergency room visits by an estimated 1.3 million a year, saving \\$1.1 billion in medical costs annually](#).

Increased job stability (Hill 2013, [Clemans-Cope 2008](#)) and the likelihood that low income parents take leave when their children have health problems ([Clemans-Cope 2008](#)).

Lack of access to earned sick leave may increase the risk of illness for individuals and the spread of contagious illness among the wider population (Kumar 2012).

## WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE THAT BUSINESSES SUPPORT EARNED SICK DAYS 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.

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 impact or no impact 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 days law one year after it was implemented.

## FUTURE POLICY ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Cities looking to boost residents' health and well-being are looking not only at earned sick leave policies, but also at earned family leave, which allows working women and men to take time off to care for a child or other immediate relative. According to the [US Department of Labor Statistics](#), only 12 percent of US private sector workers—and 5% of low-wage workers--have access to earned family leave through their employers. 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 over all.

## RESOURCES FOR CITIES ON PAID SICK LEAVE POLICIES

[CDC-TWH](#) - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Total worker health (TWH).

[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.