



FACT SHEET

Fast Facts on Who Has Access to Paid Time Off and Flexibility

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All workers, regardless of their job type or family structure, have the potential need for paid leave and flexibility. Whether it is waiting at home for a repair person to fix the refrigerator, picking up a child when after-school arrangements fall through, or simply being too sick to work, nearly all employees need time away from work at some point.

For more information, see “Who Gets Time Off? Predicting Access to Paid Leave and Workplace Flexibility” by Sarah Jane Glynn, Heather Boushey, and Peter Berg.

While the need to occasionally take time away from work is nearly universal, the ability to do so is not. **Nearly 40 million workers—39 percent of all employees—still lack access to a single paid sick day.**¹ Furthermore, low-wage workers, who are least able to afford to lose a day’s wages or to outsource care and household tasks to paid professionals, are the least likely to have paid sick leave.

New Center for American Progress research the reveals how access to paid leave is uneven:²

- Only 15 percent of workers with earnings in the lowest quintile have access to any paid sick days, compared with 78.5 percent of those in the top earnings quintile.
- Fewer than one in five low-wage workers—19.4 percent—have access to paid vacation, compared with 78.6 percent of high-wage workers.
- Hourly workers are significantly less likely to have access to paid sick days, flexible hours, and flexible working locations than similar workers who are not paid on an hourly basis.
- When controlling for age, education, and occupation, black and Latino workers are less likely than white workers to have access to paid sick days:
 - Black workers are 5.3 percent less likely than white workers to have access to flexible days and 7.2 percent less likely to have access to flexible work hours.
 - Latino workers are 11.5 percent less likely than white workers to have access to paid sick days, 12.4 percent less likely to have paid vacation, 6.7 percent less likely to have flexible days, and 6.3 percent less likely to have flexible work hours.
- Workers with young children or elder care responsibilities are no more likely to have access to paid leave than comparable workers without the same family obligations.

The ability to take paid time off is associated with positive outcomes not just for workers and families but also for businesses and the economy:

- Workers who can take time off without losing wages are less likely to come to work sick, reducing the spread of infection among co-workers and the public.³ They also recover more quickly and ultimately require less time away from work.⁴
- Paid sick leave results in greater access to recommended preventive care, leading to earlier detection of diseases, less use of emergency rooms for routine care,⁵ and overall better health.⁶
- Paid sick days make workers 25 percent less likely to separate from their jobs—an effect that is even stronger for mothers.⁷
- Businesses benefit from reduced costs of turnover, increased productivity, and fewer illnesses.⁸

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Workplace protections should not be left up to the generosity of individual employers. Public policy solutions are needed to address inequities in access to paid leave and flexibility, and voter support for these policies remains high across political ideologies.⁹ Solutions include:

- **Guaranteeing all workers the right to accrue paid sick days:** Federal legislation such as the Healthy Families Act would enable workers to earn up to seven paid sick days per year that could be used if they or a family member were ill, needed to seek preventive care, or needed to address the aftermath of sexual or domestic violence.¹⁰
- **Ensuring access to paid family and medical leave:** Legislation such as the Family and Medical Insurance Leave, or FAMILY, Act would create a universal, affordable national program to provide wage replacement to workers who need family and medical leave.¹¹
- **Protecting workers with the right to request workplace flexibility:** Right-to-request laws would allow workers to request the type of workplace flexibility they need while protecting them from employer discrimination or retaliation. Federal legislation, such as the Schedules That Work Act, would protect workers while compelling employers to seriously consider flexibility requests and only deny them for valid business reasons. It would also require that schedules be posted two weeks in advance, allowing workers to request needed changes and plan for things such as child care arrangements.¹²

Despite the fact that all workers experience the need for time off, access is uneven. Public policy can help remedy this by ensuring that all workers have access to paid sick days, paid family and medical leave, and the right to request workplace flexibility. Workers, businesses, and the economy will all benefit when every worker has the right to the same fair and reasonable workplace standards.

Endnotes

- 1 Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 6. Selected paid leave benefits: Access," July 24, 2015, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ebs2.t06.htm>.
- 2 Sarah Jane Glynn, Heather Boushey, and Peter Berg, "Who Gets Time Off? Predicting Access to Paid Leave and Workplace Flexibility" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016).
- 3 Tom W. Smith and Jibum Kim, "Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences" (Chicago: University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center, 2010), available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/paid-sick-days-attitudes-and-experiences.pdf>; U.S. Department of Labor, *Get the Facts on Paid Sick Time* (2015), available at <http://www.dol.gov/featured/paidleave/get-the-facts-sicktime.pdf>.
- 4 U.S. Department of Labor, *Get the Facts on Paid Sick Time*.
- 5 Kevin Miller, Claudia Williams, and Youngmin Yi, "Paid Sick Days and Health: Cost Savings from Reduced Emergency Department Visits" (Washington: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2011), available at <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-days-and-health-cost-savings-from-reduced-emergency-department-visits>.
- 6 Liz Ben-Ishai and Alex Wang, "Paid Leave Necessary for an Ounce of Prevention: Paid Leave and Access to Preventive Health Care" (Washington: Center for Law & Social Policy, 2015), available at <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/PreventiveHealthPaidLeave.pdf>.
- 7 Heather D. Hill, "Paid Sick Leave and Job Stability," *Work and Occupations* 40 (2) (2013): 143–173.
- 8 Heather Boushey, *Finding Time: The Economics of Work-Life Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
- 9 Make it Work, "Voters Want New Workplace Policies," available at http://www.makeitworkcampaign.org/poll-voters-want-new-workplace-policies/#_ftn1 (last accessed March 2016).
- 10 *Healthy Families Act*, H.R. 1286, 113 Cong. 1 sess. (Government Printing Office, 2013).
- 11 *Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act of 2013*, H.R. 3712, 113 Cong. 1 sess. (Government Printing Office, 2013).
- 12 *Schedules that Work Act*, H.R. 5159, 113 Cong. 2 sess. (Government Printing Office, 2014).