

# Paid Sick Days Will Improve The Health of All Denver Residents

Fact Sheet – Fall, 2011



## **Paid sick days can reduce transmission of the flu:**

- More than a third of flu cases are transmitted in schools and workplaces.
- Staying at home when infected could reduce the number of people impacted by pandemic influenza by 15%–34%.
- One-quarter of respondents to a national survey report that they would have “serious financial problems” if they stayed home for 7 to 10 days during a flu pandemic. Such economic concerns are a major barrier to compliance with advice to stay home and to effective control of pandemic flu.

## **Paid sick days will make restaurants safer:**

- Only 28% of Denver workers in food preparation and serving occupations have paid sick days, while 87% of those in managerial positions do.
- During a 5-year period (2006-2010) in Denver, there were 221 reported illnesses and 6 hospitalizations from food-borne disease outbreaks in restaurants, hotels, and long term care facilities and in food served by caterers. At least 5 of the 19 incidents involved ill food handlers.
- Colorado Food Code Section 2-201 states that “No employee, while infected with a communicable disease that can be transmitted by foods, . . . shall work in a retail food establishment in any capacity in which there is a likelihood of such employee contaminating food or food-contact surfaces with pathogenic organisms or transmitting disease to other persons.” Yet many restaurant workers can’t take time off and pay their bills. If they do take time off, many face disciplinary action.

*“When dad goes to the rehab care centers, many of the [certified nursing assistants] don't have paid sick days and that puts not just my dad at risk but also everybody else..”*

- Denver focus group participant

## **Paid sick days will reduce the likelihood of outbreaks of stomach flu in nursing homes:**

- In the past 18 months, there were 526 cases of norovirus (stomach flu) infections in 24 outbreaks in facilities for the elderly (e.g., nursing homes and assisted living) in Denver. Five of these cases led to hospitalization.
- A study in New York found that the respiratory and gastrointestinal disease outbreak risk is significantly lower in nursing homes with paid sick day policies. Between 30 and 45 fewer California nursing homes would have norovirus outbreaks each year under a paid sick day policy.

# Paid Sick Days & Health Fact Sheet

*“I work at [a national coffee chain], but when I'm sick I am forced to choose between my bills or my health and the health of others. When I go to work sick, I am putting my coworkers and my customers at risk. I have to pay my rent, which might mean that you get a cold with your latte. If we had paid sick days, we would stay home to recover quickly, and return to work healthy and productive” – Denver focus group participant*

## **Paid sick days will reduce emergency room usage and prevent unnecessary hospitalizations:**

- About 25,000 hospital admissions for chronic diseases such as asthma, hypertension, and diabetes annually are entirely preventable in Denver.
- Among workers with health insurance, those without paid sick days are 15% more likely to use the ER and almost 40% more likely to delay necessary medical care relative to those with paid sick days.

## **Paid sick days will protect workers from income loss and the threat of job loss during periods of illness:**

- *“When I get sick, I'm forced to chose between missing a day's pay, and going into work when I should be staying home. For me, the loss of pay for staying home sick is simply not one I can afford. I also have many co-workers who are in the same position. For me, that's concerning not only from my personal financial perspective, but also from a public health standpoint when workers are forced to come into work sick”.- Denver focus group participant*

## **Americans who need paid sick days the most have the least access to them:**

- 79% of U.S. workers with incomes in the bottom 25% do not have paid sick days.
- Nationally, 40% of mothers whose children have asthma and 36% whose children have other chronic health conditions do not have paid sick days.
- Parents who have paid time off are over 5 times more likely to care for children when they are sick.

## **All workers in Denver deserve paid sick days:**

- There is no right to paid sick days in the United States.
- 41% of private sector employees – over 107,000 workers – in Denver lack paid sick days.

## **If the paid sick days ballot measure passed:**

- Workers will earn one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours of paid work.
- Workers in firms with 10 or more employees will be able to take up to 72 hours of paid sick leave in a calendar year. Those in firms with fewer than 10 employees will be able to take up to 40 hours.
- Workers will be able to take paid sick time for their own or a family member's illnesses or preventive health care or to recover from domestic abuse or sexual assault.

***The health of all Denver residents would significantly benefit if workers earned paid sick days and used them when ill or when a family member needs care.***