

# Paid Sick Days: A Strategy To Reduce Communicable Disease Transmission in New Hampshire

Fact Sheet - July 31, 2009

*New Hampshire is considering legislation to ensure that all workers in the state can earn paid sick days. Guaranteed paid sick days would help stop the transfer of communicable diseases in the state - at schools, work places, restaurants, and nursing homes.*



## **Paid sick days can help reduce transmission of communicable diseases, including pandemic flu.**

- More than one-third of flu cases are transmitted in schools and workplaces; another one-third are transmitted in other community settings.<sup>1</sup>
- Staying at home when infected may reduce the number of people impacted by pandemic influenza by 15%–34%.<sup>2</sup>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Recommends: “stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick.”<sup>3</sup>



*To prepare for an influenza pandemic, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommends that **every employer should “develop a sick leave policy that does not penalize sick employees, thereby encouraging employees who have influenza-related symptoms to stay home so that they do not infect other employees.”***

*Similarly, OSHA states that employers should “recognize that employees with ill family members may need to stay home to care for them.”<sup>4</sup>*

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

- In 2007, 24% of lodging/food services firms in New Hampshire provided paid sick days to full-time workers and 9% provided them to part-time workers. In contrast, 83% of firms in professional services provided paid sick days to full-time workers and 48% provided them to part-time workers.<sup>5</sup>
- From 2004 to 2008, there were 39 foodborne disease outbreaks involving 616 persons in New Hampshire reported to the state Department of Health & Human Services, excluding those involving nursing home residents. Most outbreaks (89% of the cases) occurred in public places including restaurants, schools, workplaces, and recreational and healthcare facilities where food was prepared or served by workers.<sup>6</sup>
- New Hampshire Administrative Rules prohibits infectious food workers from the workplace.<sup>7</sup>
- However, many restaurant workers can’t take time off and still pay their rent. Many face disciplinary action if they take time off. Ensuring paid sick days for all workers will help make restaurants safer.<sup>8</sup>

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***NH Rules on Communicative Diseases (He-P 301.05) state:*** “For any communicable disease that poses a threat to the public’s health...individuals in sensitive occupations, such as healthcare, food service, and child care, may be excluded from work or restricted from certain job responsibilities until they are no longer infectious. Individuals with symptoms of acute gastrointestinal illness shall be restricted from duties involving direct patient care, childcare, or serving of food...until 48 hours after the resolution of symptoms...”<sup>7</sup>



## **Paid sick days will reduce the likelihood of communicable disease outbreaks in nursing homes.**

- Nationally, 27% of nursing home workers do not have paid sick day benefits.<sup>9</sup>
- From January 2006 to April 2008, there were 5,392 cases of outbreak-related gastrointestinal illness among nursing home residents in NH, all of which were transmitted through person-to-person contact, according to the state Department of Health & Human Services.<sup>10</sup>
- During the same period in NH, there were 39 outbreaks of respiratory illness (involving 593 nursing home residents) due to influenza virus and other unknown pathogens, all of which were transmitted through person-to-person contact.<sup>11</sup>
- A study in New York found significantly lower respiratory and gastrointestinal disease outbreak risk in nursing homes with paid sick day policies. Another study found that between 30 and 45 fewer California nursing homes would have stomach flu outbreaks each year under a paid sick day policy.<sup>12</sup>

## **If New Hampshire passes the paid sick days bill:**

- 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 earn up to 40 hours of paid sick leave in a year. Firms with fewer than 10 employees will be exempt.
- Workers will be able to take paid sick time for their own illnesses, for preventive health care, to recover from domestic abuse or sexual assault, or to care for family members who are sick.

## **All workers in New Hampshire deserve paid sick days.**

- There is no right to paid sick days in the United States.
- Only about half of all workers in the United States receive paid sick day benefits.<sup>13</sup>
- In 2007, about 50% of all firms in NH did not offer paid sick days to full-time workers and about 80% of firms did not offer them to part-time workers.<sup>14</sup>

***The health of all workers, children, and seniors in New Hampshire would significantly benefit if workers earned paid sick days and used them when ill or when a family member needs care.***

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