Access to Paid Sick Time in Westchester County, New York

Approximately 36 percent of workers in Westchester County, New York lack paid sick time, and low-income and part-time workers are especially unlikely to be covered. Access to paid sick time promotes safe and healthy work environments by reducing the spread of illness (Kumar, et al. 2013; Drago 2010) and workplace injuries (Asfaw, Pana-Cryan, and Rosa 2012), reduces healthcare costs (Miller, Williams, and Yi 2011), and reduces work-family conflict by providing greater flexibility to fulfill caregiving responsibilities (Allen, et al. 2014). This briefing paper presents estimates of access to paid sick time in Westchester County by sex, race and ethnicity, occupation, part/full-time employment status, and personal earnings through analysis of government data sources, including the 2012–2014 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and the 2012–2014 American Community Survey (ACS).

Access to Paid Sick Time by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

- Among all workers in Westchester County, 64 percent have access to paid sick time (Figure 1), and 36 percent, or about 123,000 workers, lack access (Table 1).¹

- Workers of color are less likely than white workers to have access, with Hispanic workers substantially less likely to have access (Figure 1): 50 percent of Hispanic, 33 percent of Black, and 32 percent of Asian workers in Westchester County lack access to paid sick time compared with 31 percent of White workers (Table 1).

- State and local government workers are much more likely than private sector workers to have paid sick time: 87 percent of state and local government workers have access to paid sick time in Westchester County compared with 60 percent of private sector workers (Figure 1).
Figure 1. Paid Sick Time Access Rates by Sex and Race and Ethnicity in Westchester County, 2012–2014

Table 1. Lack of Access to Paid Sick Time by Sex, Race and Ethnicity in Westchester County, 2012–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Group</th>
<th>Without Access to Paid Sick Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>63,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>59,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>54,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>16,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>6,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>43,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/More than one</td>
<td>1,732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Workforce</strong></td>
<td>123,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Sector</strong></td>
<td>116,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Sector</strong></td>
<td>7,130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Access rates are for individuals, 18 years and older, working in Westchester County regardless of their place of residence. “Other/More than one race” includes American Indian or Alaska natives and individuals reporting multiple racial identities. Neither of these populations were individually large enough for separate estimations; both were kept in the interest of inclusion. Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of 2012-2014 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and 2012-2014 IPUMS American Community Survey (ACS).
Access to Paid Sick Time by Occupation

Access to paid sick time varies widely depending on the type of job employees hold. Across the broad spectrum of occupations in Westchester County, access to paid sick time varies from a high of 86 percent for Computer, Engineering, and Science occupations to only 46 percent for those employed in Service occupations. Paid sick time is especially uncommon in jobs requiring frequent contact with the public, with important public health consequences. Workers in Service occupations have the lowest coverage of paid sick time. These low access rates pose major public health concerns, as workers in this occupational category are often in close contact with customers and co-workers, which can foster the spread of infectious diseases and put the public at greater risk of illness.

Figure 2. Paid Sick Time Access Rates by Occupation in Westchester County, 2012–2014

Note: Access rates are for individuals, 18 years and older, working in Westchester County regardless of their place of residence. Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of 2012–2014 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and 2012-2014 IPUMS American Community Survey (ACS).

Access to Paid Sick Time by Hours Worked

- Paid sick time is particularly rare for part-time workers (those who work fewer than 35 hours per week). Only 30 percent of part-time workers have access to paid sick time (Figure 3). These workers are also disproportionately likely to be working in service occupations where access rates also tend to be low.²

- Among those who work 40 hours a week or more, 74 percent have access to paid sick time in Westchester County (Figure 3).
Access to Paid Sick Time by Earnings Level

Low-paid workers are far less likely than higher earners to have access to paid sick time. This means that those who can least afford to take an unpaid day off are also least likely to be covered.

- One third (33 percent) of full-time workers in the lowest earnings bracket (less than $15,000 annually) have access to paid sick time (Figure 4).
- Nearly 90 percent of workers in the highest earnings bracket ($65,000 or more annually) have access to paid sick time (Figure 4).
Benefits of Paid Sick Time

Paid sick time delivers multiple benefits for employers, children, women, and communities at large. The economic and public health benefits of paid sick time coverage are substantial, including stronger, safer work environments; improved child and family health and well-being; and reduced health care costs.\(^3\)

**Stronger, Safer Work Environments**

- Research documents that workers without access to paid sick time are three times more likely to forgo treatment for themselves and almost two times more likely to forgo care for a family member compared with workers who have paid sick time (DeRigne, Stoddard-Dare, and Quinn 2016). Further, a recent study found that employers who provided paid sick time to their employees reported fewer occupational injuries among employees than those who did not have paid sick time coverage (Asfaw, Pana-Cryan, and Rosa 2012).

- Paid sick time policies help reduce the spread of illness in the workplace by making it possible for contagious workers to stay home (Kumar, et al. 2013) and for families to self-quarantine without concerns for lost wages or job loss (DeRigne, Stoddard-Dare, and Quinn 2016).

- Workers with access to paid sick time are more likely to engage in preventative care, such as getting vaccinations against illnesses such as influenza (Wilson, Wang, and Stimpson 2014). These preventive measures benefit both employers and co-workers – increased vaccinations against the flu lead to fewer work absences and healthcare visits annually (Wilson, Wang, and Stimpson 2014). Using Google Flu data from 2003 to 2015, researchers demonstrated that influenza-like infection rates decrease by about 10 percent when employees without coverage are provided with paid sick time (Pichler and Ziebarth 2015).\(^4\)

**Supporting Children and Families**

- Paid sick time policies help parents fulfill their caregiving responsibilities. Research shows that about a third of parents are concerned about lost wages or job loss resulting from caring for a sick child and report that they do not receive enough paid time off to care for their children (University of Michigan C.S Mott Children’s Hospital 2012). Access to paid sick time is also uniquely important to women, as research indicates that mothers stay home to care for sick children far more often than fathers (74 percent of mothers compared with 40 percent of fathers report staying home to care for a sick child; Smith and Schaefer 2012).

- One 2011 Gallup poll found that most caregivers, including parents, reported missing at least one full day of work to fulfill their caregiving duties with an average of 6.6 workdays missed per year (Witters 2011).
• Paid sick time allows parents to stay home with sick children to inhibit the escalation of illness and reduce the transmission of contagious diseases in schools and child care centers. The Center for Disease Control reports that children ages five and younger are at a high-risk of experiencing complications from the flu, which can result in hospitalization and even death (Center for Disease Control n.d.). Paid time away from work enables parents to more easily address the health needs of their children, including seeking medical care to prevent against health complications (such as those that arise from the flu), attending well-child doctor visits, receiving regularly scheduled treatments like vaccinations, or managing a chronic illness or disability.

• Paid sick time gives adult children and family members the time to care for elderly, disabled, and medically fragile relatives. The AARP reports that in 2013, about 40 million family caregivers provided approximately 37 billion hours of care worth an estimated 470 billion dollars. In the same report the AARP states that 60 percent of family caregivers providing care in 2014 were employed either full-time or part-time and that flexible work schedules better enable these employees to meet their caregiving demands (Reinhard et al. 2015).

**Reducing Health Care Costs**

• Paid sick time can be used for preventative care, which is important to the management of chronic illnesses and screenings for diseases. Workers with paid sick time are more likely to engage in preventative measures that can lead to early detection and treatment, thereby reducing the severity of diagnoses and related medical expenses. A 2012 study using 2008 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) data found that workers with paid sick time are significantly more likely to have had mammograms, Pap tests, and endoscopiest, and to have seen a doctor during the previous year than those without coverage (Peipens et al. 2012).

• Paid sick time allows people to take time away from work for medical appointments, rather than waiting until after work hours, when they are more likely to use hospital emergency services. Analysis of data from the National Health Interview Survey shows that workers with paid sick time are less likely than other workers to use hospital emergency departments, even after accounting for variables such as age, income, education, and health insurance access (Miller, Williams, and Yi 2011). Using the same data, other research indicates that paid sick time reduces the number of visits to the emergency department – people are 14 percent less likely to be moderate users (1 to 3 visits a year) and 32 percent less likely to be repeated users (4 or more times a year) of the emergency department when they have greater options around obtaining medical care (Bhuyan et al. 2016).
Notes

1 Throughout this briefing paper, the total workforce includes both private and public sector workers, but excludes self-employed and federal government workers as well as members of the armed forces.


4 These researchers compared the rates of influenza-like illnesses in regions with paid sick days policies – including the District of Columbia, Connecticut, California, Massachusetts, and Oregon (Pichler and Ziebarth 2015).

References


DeRigne, LeaAnne, Patricia Stoddard-Dare, and Linda Quinn. 2016. "Workers without paid sick leave less likely to take time off for illness or injury compared to those with paid sick leave." Health Affairs 35(3): 520-527.


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