

# Fact Sheet

IWPR #B293

January 2011

## 44 Million U.S. Workers Lacked Paid Sick Days in 2010: 77 Percent of Food Service Workers Lacked Access

A new analysis from the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) reveals that, after correcting for job tenure requirements imposed by employers, the estimated number of employees who can access paid sick days decreases noticeably. In 2010, 4.2 million employees were hypothetically eligible for paid sick days but in reality lacked access due to short job tenure. When accounting for those employees, only 58 percent of private sector employees in the U.S. had access to paid sick days in 2010 (see Table 1). A total of 44 million private sector employees lacked access to paid sick days.

**Table 1. Paid Sick Days: Eligible Employees vs. Employees with Access**

Occupational Category	Employees Eligible for Paid Sick Days	Employees with 3.5 Months or Less Tenure	Employees with Access to Paid Sick Days
<b>All Private Sector Workers</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>58%</b>
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	26%	11%	23%
Construction and Extraction Occupations	36%	9%	33%
Protective Services Occupations	37%	8%	34%
Personal Care and Service Occupations	42%	10%	38%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	53%	6%	50%
Sales and Related Occupations	55%	8%	51%
Production Occupations	53%	4%	51%
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	55%	8%	51%
Installation, Maintenance and Repair Occupations	66%	5%	63%
Healthcare Support Occupations	72%	8%	66%
Education, Training and Library Occupations	71%	5%	68%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media Occupations	74%	7%	69%
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	74%	6%	69%
Healthcare Practitioner and Technical Occupations	81%	4%	78%
Community and Social Services Occupations	86%	6%	81%
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	90%	6%	84%
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	88%	3%	85%
Legal Occupations	89%	4%	86%
Life, Physical and Social Science Occupations	91%	4%	87%
Management Occupations	91%	3%	88%
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	93%	4%	90%

Source: IWPR analysis of the January 2010 Displaced Worker, Employee Tenure, and Occupational Mobility Supplement to the Current Population Survey, and unpublished data from the 2010 National Compensation Survey.

The IWPR analysis corrects for a weakness in the data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' National Compensation Survey (NCS). The official Bureau of Labor Statistics estimate using NCS data is that 62 percent of private sector U.S. employees are provided with paid sick time,<sup>1</sup> yielding an estimate of 40 million employees without paid sick days.<sup>2</sup>

The NCS collects information about whether employee positions are covered by policies that pay full salary to employees in case they need to take time off to recover from illness. Even when positions are covered with policies that make employees *eligible* for paid sick days, employees in those jobs may not yet have met employer-imposed thresholds related to job tenure that would enable them to *access* and use paid sick time. On average, employees have to wait 78 business days or about 3.5 months to access paid sick days.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the NCS data overestimate the number of employees that can use paid sick time.

The prevalence of employees eligible for paid sick days but unable to use them due to job tenure requirements is uneven across occupations (see Table 1). Some occupations, such as management, have high rates of eligibility (91 percent) and relatively few low-tenure workers (only 3 percent), yielding high coverage rates (88 percent). However, other occupations have both low rates of eligibility and many low-tenure employees, generating extremely low rates of coverage. These include construction and extraction, food preparation and serving, personal care and service, and protective services, leaving workers in these occupations much more vulnerable in the event of sudden illness or injury. Of perhaps greatest concern for public health and contagion prevention, *fewer than one-quarter of food preparation and serving workers can use paid sick days.*

The inability of employees to use paid sick days has serious implications during flu season and for outbreaks of other diseases. Implications are even greater during unexpected outbreaks of virulent illness, such as the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, when workers without paid sick days were much more likely to go to work while infected with H1N1.<sup>4</sup> The fewer the number of workers who are able to stay home when sick, the more likely it is that diseases will spread, increasing the incidence of disease and related health care costs, and causing needless economic losses.

*This fact sheet was prepared by Claudia Williams, Robert Drago, Ph.D., and Kevin Miller, Ph.D. Financial support was provided by the Ford Foundation.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). 2010. *Employee Benefits in the United States* (USDLE-10-1044). "Table 6. Selected paid leave benefits: Access, National Compensation Survey, March 2010" <<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf>> (December 10, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). 2010. *Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages*. Private Workers in the United States, March 2010 <<http://www.bls.gov/cew/#databases>> (December 10, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. *The Healthy Families Act: Safeguarding Americans' Livelihood, Families and Health with Paid Sick Days*. 110th Cong., 1st sess., 13 February 2007. [http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/Hartmann\\_HFA\\_testimony021307.pdf](http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/Hartmann_HFA_testimony021307.pdf) (December 10, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Drago, Robert and Kevin Miller. 2009. *Sick at Work: Infected Employees in the Workplace During the H1N1 Pandemic*. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Washington, DC.