

No parent should have to choose between a child's health or work, that's why we need paid sick days ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Every day, we hear from parents who have to choose between their child's health and their job.

"I can't come to his appointment again. I don't get time off work."

"I know therapy is important for her, but if I go, I'll lose my job."

"I can't keep them home from child care, there's no one to watch them when I'm at work."

Children don't choose when to get sick. They don't choose what kind of conditions they're born with, and the therapies they need to thrive. Yet, parents are forced to choose between caring for their children and making ends meet because they cannot take time off work when their children are sick.

They are forced to make impossible decisions about sending their sick children to school and child care because they cannot take time off work; missing their children's doctor's appointments, vaccinations and important checkups. It means that children with disabilities might not get therapy, which happens during working hours and often in specialized places.

Permanent and employer-paid sick days for workers is an evidence-based policy that improves their children's access to vaccination and primary care, reduces reliance on the emergency department, and encourages parents to keep their sick kids home rather than sending them to school. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare what happens without adequate paid sick days. For example, essential workers without paid sick days have had to keep working while they or their children fall ill, sometimes with deadly consequences for them and their families.

Meanwhile, to stay home and risk losing jobs and wages has tumbled families into poverty, precarious housing, food insecurity and worsening mental health. In such a circumstance children become double the victims as these negative experiences cause toxic stress, leading to lasting impairments in health and functioning.

As some have enjoyed a summer of loosened restrictions, parents of young children remain scared. The Delta variant may impact children harder, and other respiratory viruses are on the rise off season and hitting stronger than before. At the outset, their symptoms are virtually indistinguishable from COVID-19, to which children under 12 remain unvaccinated. Despite a negative COVID test, symptoms can still linger for weeks, yet children cannot return to care until asymptomatic.

Some parents we've seen have been in tears, begging for something to get rid of that runny nose faster, so their children can return to child care and they won't lose their jobs.

Who has access to paid sick days, and who is denied, is not random. Families without paid sick days tend to be racialized, lower-income earners. For families who can afford to stay home with their children when they are sick, those children recover faster and do better. Inequitable access to paid sick days is just another example of racial injustice, and without legislation to mandate paid sick days for everyone, we perpetuate inequities for generations to come.

A lack of paid sick days also impacts workers who have been supporting families, like early childhood educators (ECEs) and child care workers, who predominantly identify as female and are persistently underpaid, and have been on the front lines throughout the pandemic. In addition to increasing burnout, stress and concern for their own well being, a lack of paid sick days has compromised their ability to take time off to rest and recover and even to care for their own children.

The burnout has compounded existing retention issues in the child care sector leading many in the industry to consider leaving. This is a twofold challenge, with some child care programs struggling to remain open for children and families or return to pre-COVID capacity, and also creating staff turnover which will impact children's learning, experiences and well-being in their child care spaces.

With the rise of the Delta variant and the opening of schools, it is almost certain that there will be many more children who are sick with

respiratory illnesses. Some of these children will be severely sick. This suffering is preventable. It is beyond reproach that parents will have to choose between feeding their children or finding medical care for them as the paltry three temporary paid sick days are set to expire in September. We have to ask ourselves, what does it say about our society when those who care for children don't receive the care they need?

In order to protect the lives of our future generations, those who care for them — whether they are parents, guardians or ECEs — must have access to paid sick days. If the provincial government cares about our children, minimizing the fourth wave, and building a healthier society, they will implement at least ten permanent, employer-paid sick days. If not, they are prioritizing narrow business interests over the health of our children, communities, and workplaces.

Our businesses can't care for us in the future. Only our children can.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: paid sick days ^[4]

parents ^[5]

women ^[6]

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