

# Paid sick leave access expands with widespread state action

Low-wage workers without access face economic and health insecurity

**Summary:** Over the past decade, 15 states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws requiring employers to allow workers to earn paid sick time. As a result, the share of workers who have access to paid sick leave nationwide has increased over this time. However, lack of paid sick days is still a real problem for many workers—especially low-wage workers.



**Read the full report**  
[epi.org/274474](https://epi.org/274474)

## Key findings

- State-level laws providing the right to earn paid sick days corresponded with a significant increase in access to paid sick days across the country.
- Overall, 78% of private-sector workers currently have access to paid sick days, up from 63% in 2010.
- Across the country, the share of the lowest-wage workers with access to paid sick time nearly doubled between 2010 and 2023, from 20% to 39%.
- While this marks progress, it still means 61% of the lowest-wage workers do not have access to paid sick time.

## Why this matters

For the average worker who lacks paid sick days, the costs of taking unpaid sick time can make a painful dent in their monthly budget. Workers without paid sick time are put in a precarious position. If they go to work sick (or send their child to school sick), they compromise their own (or their child's) health. They may also spread illness to others. But if they stay home, they may not be able to pay for groceries or rent.

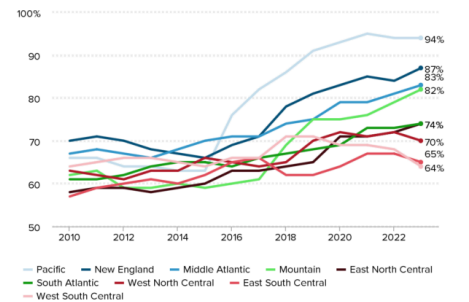
## How to fix it

Passage of a national paid sick leave standard—such as the Healthy Families Act—would be the best way to ensure all workers are protected from health and economic insecurity when they become sick. In the absence of a national standard, states and localities still have a critical role to play in expanding access to paid sick days.

## Paid sick leave access is growing

**State-level paid sick mandates expanded access**

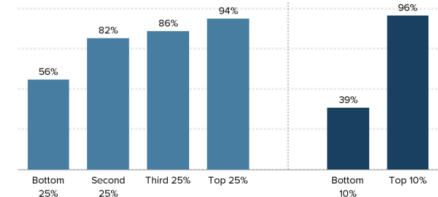
Access to paid sick days, by Census division, 2010–2023



## Low-wage workers fall short

**Most high-wage workers have paid sick days; most low-wage workers do not**

Share of private-sector workers with access to paid sick days, by wage group, 2023



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey 2023.

Economic Policy Institute