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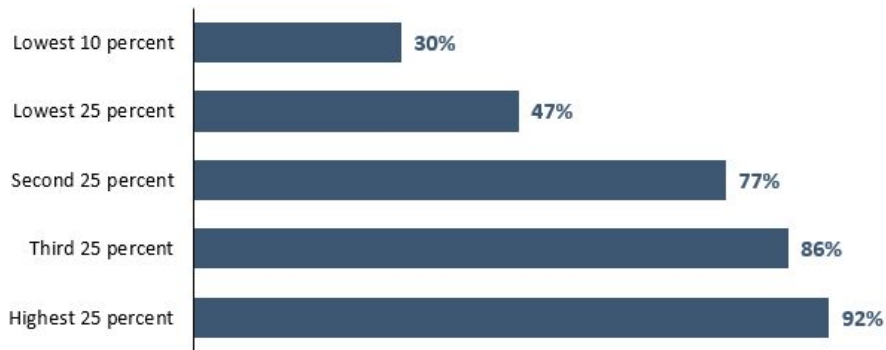
Louisiana Budget Project

Sick days makes for a healthier Louisiana

[Nearly half of Louisiana workers lack access to paid sick days](#). And, [low wage workers are two and three times less likely](#) to have access to paid sick days than higher wage workers. This means those who struggle the most to make ends meet routinely face an excruciating choice between caring for themselves and their families when they get sick or keeping their job. Louisiana can do better.

Low wage workers are least likely to have paid sick days

Percent of workers by wage with paid sick days.



Source: National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2018, U.S. Department of Labor

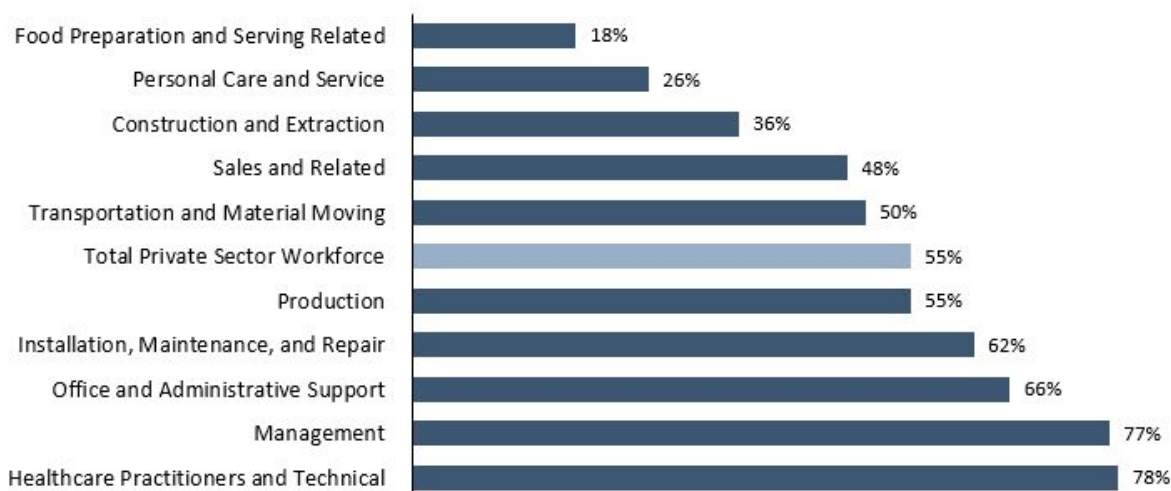
The coronavirus pandemic has brought [national attention](#) to this and other longstanding needs for [stronger worker protections and benefits](#). The ability to stay home when you're sick without fear of losing your job or facing disciplinary action is essential for workers to comply with [Centers for Disease Control guidelines](#) during the current public health crisis. It's also an important policy to help safeguard and promote public health before a health crisis begins, and a basic worker protection that should be available to all workers regardless of how much they are paid.

Yet, many low wage jobs that put workers in direct contact with the public and therefore at greater risk for disease exposure, are among those [least likely to have access to paid sick days](#). For example, restaurant and retail store workers are among the least likely to be able to take a sick day, though they face high exposure rates to the flu and other contagious diseases, like COVID-19.

Louisiana workers hit hardest by COVID-19 are also among least likely to have access to paid sick days



Percentage of Louisiana workers with access to paid sick days for top 10 occupations



Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of 2011–2013 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and 2013 1-year IPUMS American Community Survey (ACS).

Recent federal legislation will help make up for the absence of a comprehensive national or state sick leave policy during the pandemic. But the [paid leave provisions](#) in the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) are only temporary. Workers need access to paid leave any time they get sick, not just during public health emergencies.

Research has shown that sick days are a simple and effective policy that benefits [public health](#), workers, families, and [businesses](#):

- Sick days allow workers to stay home and reduce the spread of disease. A survey of worker attitudes and behaviors found [those without access to paid sick days were 1.5 times more likely to go to work sick](#), thus potentially prolonging their own illness and exposing others. The same survey found that [nearly 1 in 4 workers reported either losing a job or being threatened with job loss](#) for taking a sick day.
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- Workers who have access to paid sick leave are more likely to get [routine and preventive medical care for themselves and their families](#), [less likely to use the emergency room for routine care](#), and [more likely to get a flu vaccine](#) for themselves and [their children](#). Parents with access to paid sick days are also [more likely to bring their children for well-child checkups](#) and other preventive-care appointments.
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- Businesses that provide paid sick leave experience less [employee turnover](#). This is especially true in lower-wage industries [like restaurants](#), where both turnover and exposure to illness are high. It also has been shown to reduce the loss in productivity that occurs when people work while sick, which is estimated to [cost the U.S. economy \\$234 billion annually](#). The availability of sick days also leads to a [healthier and less accident-prone workforce](#).

Louisiana legislators have a chance to fix this problem when they return to work this spring

Two bills have been introduced that would help guarantee that workers don't have to choose between their health and their paycheck. One of the bills would put Louisiana in the company of [12 states and the District of](#)

[Columbia by establishing](#) a statewide sick day policy for their workers. The other bill would lift the state preemption law that bans cities and parishes from enacting their own sick leave policies, which [18 counties and cities](#) across the country have already done.

- [House Bill 832 by Rep. Matthew Willard](#) is a statewide solution. It covers both full- and part-time workers with up to 40 hours of sick time per year. Workers would accrue 1 hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours they work. Workers in businesses with 20 or more employees would receive paid sick time, while people who work in companies with fewer than 20 employees would receive unpaid, job-protected sick time.
- [House Bill 797 by Rep. Royce Duplessis](#) allows local governments to set minimum standards for sick leave within their local jurisdictions, which is one of several areas where the state currently forbids (or, “preempts”) local government action.

Access to paid sick days are an important part of state preparedness for public health emergencies and safeguarding public health more generally. They are also a basic protection that will help workers and their families rebuild stronger and more securely after Covid-19 knowing that if they get sick, they have the time away from work to get better.

- by Stacey Roussel