

Study: Almost half of NYC workers lack sick leave *Research finds lower-income employees less likely to get paid time off for illnesses.*

By Daniel Massey
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Nearly half of the city's workforce—about 1.9 million New Yorkers—don't get paid sick leave, according to a new study by the Community Service Society of New York, a nonprofit advocacy group for the poor.

Low-income workers are nearly twice as likely as higher-income workers to receive no paid sick days, with 66% of workers earning less than \$36,000 a year for a family of three lacking the benefit, according to the study.

More than seven in 10 low-income workers without paid sick leave reported going to work sick in the past year, while three in 10 reported sending a sick child to school because they could not take time off from work, the study shows.

The portion of workers in households earning \$18,000 to \$36,000 annually for a family of three has declined as the economy has tanked. Only 33% received paid sick leave in 2009, compared to 43% the year before and 56% in 2007.

The survey comes as a bill that would compel employers to provide workers with paid sick days winds its way through the City Council. Under the measure, employers with 10 or more workers would have to provide nine paid sick days, while companies with fewer than 10 workers would have to give five. The city's five chambers of commerce have raised opposition to the measure, arguing it would place an unfair burden on businesses during tough economic times.

"It's really low-income workers who are affected the most," said Councilwoman Gale Brewer, D-Manhattan, the bill's lead sponsor.

Low-income Latino workers are most likely to be without paid sick days, the study shows, with seven in 10 not receiving any paid sick leave. Authors of the report attributed this to the fact that Latinos are less likely than blacks or whites to be union members.

Workers without paid sick leave are concentrated in the leisure, hospitality and retail and wholesale trade sectors, which account for two-thirds of workers who don't get the benefit, according to the study.

Small businesses are least likely to provide paid sick leave, the study shows. For instance, nearly two-thirds of workers in businesses with 10 or fewer employees do not receive paid sick leave—as compared to only 18% of workers in large businesses with 500 or more employees. Those in businesses with 10 or fewer employees represent more than a quarter of all working New Yorkers without paid sick leave.

"For those that don't offer five days or more, it is most likely that they simply couldn't afford to stay in business if they did," wrote Carl Hum and Nancy Ploeger, heads of the Brooklyn and Manhattan chambers, in a recent *Crain's* issue.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has said he supports paid sick leave for large companies, but has stopped short of embracing it for small ones. This morning, his rival, City Comptroller William Thompson, said he supported paid sick days, but that "one size does not fit all." Council Speaker Christine Quinn has yet to take a position.

Ms. Brewer said that she has met with many small business owners and representatives of the chambers and is eager to include them in the legislative process.

"There's lots of room for compromise," she said. "But the basic issue is, 'if you're sick, you should be able to stay home.'"

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