

# Protecting Health During COVID-19 and Beyond: Where Does the U.S. Stand Compared to the Rest of the World on Paid Sick Leave?



**WORLD Policy Analysis Center**

## NUMBERS TO NOTE

**181**

*countries guarantee paid sick leave; the U.S. is one of only 11 countries that do not*

**73%**

*of countries guarantee paid sick leave from the first day of illness*

**67%**

*of high-income countries explicitly guarantee paid sick leave to self-employed workers*

**76%**

*of countries guarantee at least 6 weeks of paid sick leave*

## ABOUT THE DATA

This fact sheet presents findings from the following article:

Jody Heymann, Amy Raub, Willetta Waisath, Michael McCormack, Ross Weistroffer, Gonzalo Moreno, Elizabeth Wong, and Alison Earle (2020). [Protecting health during COVID-19 and beyond: A global examination of paid sick leave design in 193 countries](#). *Global Public Health*.

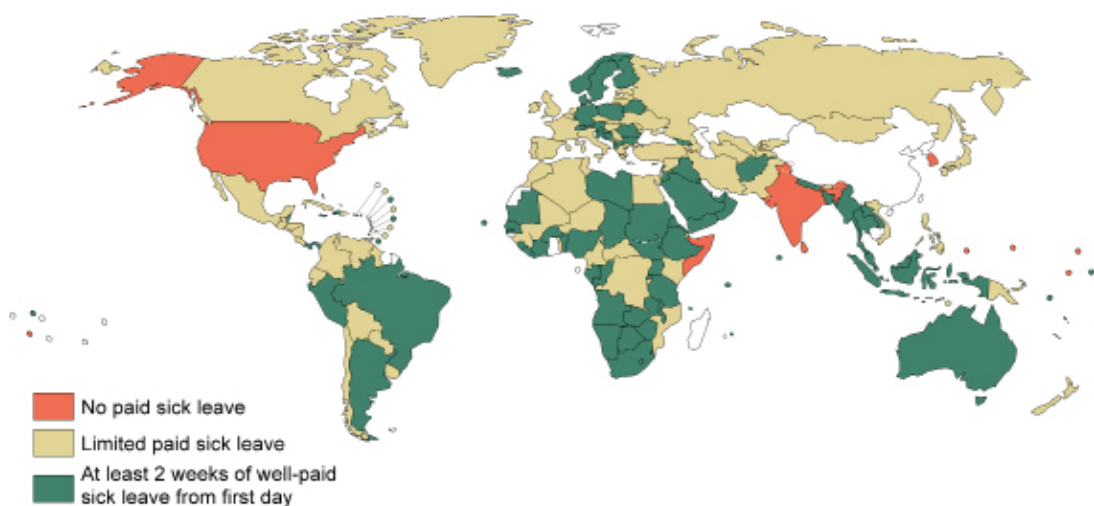
## Health and Economic Benefits of Paid Sick Leave

- Staying home while sick, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is key to reducing disease spread. Yet for millions of American workers without access to paid sick leave, staying home while sick isn't financially feasible.
- Workers who lack paid sick leave are 1.5 times more likely to go to work contagious and are less likely to see a health care provider when sick.
- During an economic shutdown, ensuring essential workers can afford to take time off work to go to the doctor at the first sign of symptoms, get tested, and self-

quarantine are essential to reducing spread to the general public.

- The economic costs of guaranteeing paid sick leave are modest compared to the costs of a pandemic, particularly once the benefits for the reduction of disease spread are considered.
- Paid sick leave also creates economic benefits in years without emerging infections.
- The United States is among many countries around the world that have recognized that their existing paid sick leave policies were insufficient to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak and have taken action to temporarily strengthen them. However, even this new policy has significant gaps in coverage.

## Is short-term paid sick leave available that supports reducing infectious disease spread?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Adult Labor Database, 2019

Data reflect long-term policies in place as of March 2019 and do not reflect temporary policy changes in response to COVID-19.



- In the last 20 years, the world has battled a series of acute health emergencies (SARS in 2002, H1N1 in 2009, MERS in 2012, and now COVID-19). A lasting national paid sick leave policy is critical to being prepared for the next new and dangerous respiratory disease.

stay home every time they're sick and/or are able to adequately recover from health complications from the virus.



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## Ensuring Adequate Paid Sick Leave

- The United States is one of only 11 countries globally that didn't have a national paid sick leave policy in place at the start of the pandemic.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of countries globally guarantee paid leave from the first day of illness, supporting workers' ability to stay home from the first sign of illness.
  - Among the countries that do not are some of those hardest hit early in the global pandemic, including Italy, Iran, and the United States.
  - Numerous countries have waived waiting periods for paid leave during the pandemic.
- Nearly all countries (91%) guarantee workers at least 2 weeks of paid sick leave, and the majority (76%) guarantee at least 6 weeks of paid sick leave.
  - Longer sick leave is important over the course of the pandemic to ensure workers

## Covering All Workers Is Feasible

- No other country makes paid sick leave benefits dependent on employer size.
  - 64% of high-income countries reduce the burden on businesses not by denying benefits to workers, but by financing the first 6 weeks of paid sick leave in full or part through social security systems.
- 67% of high-income countries explicitly guarantee paid sick leave to self-employed workers.
  - As of 2019, about 16 million Americans were self-employed. Globally, self-employed workers have been among those hardest hit by economic shutdowns.
- 65% of high-income countries extend paid sick leave to workers who have recently been hired, which is especially critical for reducing disease spread over the course of the pandemic as laid-off workers start new jobs, including filling gaps on the frontline.
- 46% of high-income countries guarantee paid sick leave to part-time workers, which matters especially to women, who are more likely than men to be working part-time in the United States and nearly every other country.

## ABOUT WORLD

The **WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD)** aims to improve the quantity and quality of globally comparative data on policies affecting health, development, well-being, and equity.

With these data, **WORLD** informs policy debates; facilitates comparative studies of policy progress, feasibility, and effectiveness; and advances efforts to hold decision-makers accountable.

## CONTACT US

**WEBSITE**  
[worldpolicycenter.org](http://worldpolicycenter.org)

**EMAIL**  
[world@ph.ucla.edu](mailto:world@ph.ucla.edu)

