

# Lack of sick leave creates tough choices for rural workers

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Rural workers have less access to sick leave, forcing them to choose between caring for themselves or family members, and losing pay or perhaps even their jobs when faced with an illness, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

"Paid sick days are a central component of job flexibility for rural and urban [workers](#) alike. Everyone gets sick, and the lack of paid sick days can place workers in a bind, especially given that workers who lack paid sick days are also more likely to lack other paid leave options, such as vacation days," said Kristin Smith, family demographer at the Carsey Institute and research assistant professor of sociology.

This data will be released today at the 2011 National Summit on Paid Sick Days and Paid Family Leave in Washington, D.C. Smith will visit the Hill on Tuesday to discuss her research on paid sick leave with staffers and [members of Congress](#).

Smith and Andrew Schaefer, a research assistant at the Carsey Institute, found that 44 percent of rural workers lack access to paid sick days. In contrast, 34 percent of suburban and 38 percent of central-city workers have fewer than five paid sick days each year. Likewise, a higher proportion of rural than urban [working parents](#) lacks access to at least five days off to care for a sick child without losing pay or having to use vacation time. The proportions without coverage drop somewhat when only full-time workers are included, but the general pattern of a rural disadvantage remains.

The key findings show:

- A greater proportion of rural workers than urban workers (both suburban and central-city) lack access to at least five paid sick days per year.
- Among business-sector workers, rural employees are less likely to have paid sick days than their urban counterparts.
- Rural workers who agree that workers are less likely to advance if they use flexible workplace policies have less access to paid sick days than their urban and suburban counterparts.

"The lack of paid sick time disproportionately affects rural workers. The rural disadvantage is particularly pronounced among rural private-sector workers and part-time workers, but even rural full-time workers have less access to paid sick days than their urban counterparts. Increasing access to paid sick days for all workers could go a long way to help workers balance their work and family responsibilities," Smith said.

"Many of these workers are supplementing lagging farm income with jobs that pay too little and lack basic workplace protections," said Ellen Bravo, executive director of the Family Values @ Work Consortium, a network of state coalitions. "Caring for their own health or that of a loved one should not cost rural workers a paycheck or a job."

The researchers used data on paid sick days and work and family characteristics from The 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) survey collected by the Families and Work Institute. The measure of paid sick days refers to access to at least five paid sick days annually, rather than any access. The research was supported by the Ford Foundation.

**More information:** The complete report about this research, "Rural Workers Have Less Access to Paid Sick Days," is available at [www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/Ca ... ch/search.php?id=165](http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/Careers/Research/ResearchPublications/2011-07-11-Rural-Workers-Have-Less-Access-to-Paid-Sick-Days)

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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