

The New York Times

Editorial

The Cost of Staying Home Sick

May 5, 2009, page A26 (http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/05/opinion/05tue3.html?_r=2&ref=opinion)

It sounded like the responsible course of action when President Obama and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged people with flu symptoms to stay at home so they do not infect others in the community — and to keep any sick children out of school as well. So far, the new swine flu virus has caused only mild disease in the United States, but it has spread through most of the country, making it likely that rising numbers of people will be developing symptoms. But what are civic-minded workers to do when staying home will cost many their daily pay and, in a recession-plagued economy, possibly their jobs if employers become exasperated over their absence?

Roughly 60 million American workers have no paid sick leave, and only a minority can draw pay if they stay home with sick children. The lack of paid leave is especially acute in this country among low-wage workers, food-service workers and part-timers, among others.

Many other countries do better. According to **Dr. Jody Heymann**, director of the Institute for Health and Social Policy at McGill University, more than 160 countries ensure that all their citizens receive paid sick leave and more than 110 of them guarantee paid leave from the first day of illness.

If President Obama is serious about responsible action to control infectious disease threats, he should back legislation to grant Americans at least seven paid sick days a year — long enough to stay home until an influenza infection subsides. Then virtually all Americans could heed his advice, and we would all be safer.

The Washington Post



Topic A

An occasional feature in which The Post asks for first impressions on a hot topic.

Topic A: Should You Be Worried About the Swine Flu?

Tuesday, May 5, 2009 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/04/AR2009050403106.html>)

The Post asked public health experts and transportation officials to sound off on the threat of swine flu -- and on what America should be doing about it. Below are contributions from Vicki Bier, Richard Wenzel, John Catoe, Irwin Redlener, Jody Heymann, Edwin D. Kilbourne and Georges C. Benjamin.

JODY HEYMANN

Founding director of McGill University's Institute for Health and Social Policy

The threat of pandemic H1N1 flu is great enough that Americans should stay home from work when they are sick and keep sick children at home to slow transmission. There's only one problem: Working Americans won't stay home when they're sick. They can't afford to because they don't have paid sick leave.

While more than 160 countries ensure that their citizens receive paid sick leave, and more than 110 countries provide paid leave from the first day of illness, America does neither. Sixty million Americans lack paid sick leave. A poll in Florida and Ohio found that half of employed men and women go to work when they are sick. And working Americans won't keep their children home when they're sick because only a small minority have sick leave they can take when their children are ill.

This problem can be solved by passing legislation to ensure that Americans have seven paid sick days. This would cover the infectious period for most cases of influenza. Is it affordable? All of the most competitive economies in the world, except the United States, guarantee paid sick leave. What we can't afford is to wait any longer. Even if we are fortunate and swine flu does not take off this spring, without national paid sick leave we will remain utterly unprepared for the next pandemic, as well as the thousands of deaths in the next normal flu season.