



American
Public Health
Association

800 I Street, N.W. • Washington, DC 20001-3710
Phone: (202) 777-APHA • Fax: (202) 777-2534
www.apha.org • comments@apha.org

Protect, Prevent, Live Well

November 16, 2009

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals and advocates in the world dedicated to promoting and protecting the health of the public and our communities, I am writing to urge your support of the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 2460), legislation that would guarantee workers up to seven paid sick days a year to recover from short-term illness, to care for a sick family member, for routine medical care or to seek assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. During the current H1N1 outbreak, a basic workplace standard of paid sick days would help prevent workers from being forced to choose between their own health, or the health of their family, and their financial security.

Since identified in April of this year, CDC estimates that 22 million people have been sickened by H1N1. Latest infection estimates indicate that about 98,000 people have been hospitalized and about 4,000 have died due to H1N1; 36,000 and 540 of which are children, respectively. Information analyzed by CDC indicates that the 2009 H1N1 flu has caused greater disease burden in people younger than 25 years of age than older people. Compared with seasonal flu, there are relatively fewer cases and deaths reported in those over 65 years of age. More so than seasonal flu, therefore, H1N1 flu is affecting the younger workforce. The lack of paid sick days is a public health concern.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, workers who interact with the public every day such as front-line fast-food workers and child care workers are much less likely to have paid sick days; only 22 percent of the lowest 10 percent of wage earners have any paid sick days. When working people have no choice but to go to work sick, their colleagues and all others they contact face an increased risk of contracting illness.

The response toward building a resilient and healthy community requires thorough planning and a comprehensive approach at all levels of society from individuals to families; and in all places where we play, learn and work. Resiliency enables a community to withstand the ravages of a pandemic and hasten the community's return

to normal. Paid sick leave for workers is essential to building resilient communities in an infectious emergency.

We've come a long way in being prepared for public health emergencies such as an H1N1 flu outbreak, but we have more work to do to protect America's health. Paid sick leave for employees is one important next step. We urge you to demonstrate your strong commitment to our nation's working families and public health by supporting the Healthy Families Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "B".

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (Emeritus)
Executive Director