



Millions of Workers Can't Stay Home When They Have Flu Symptoms

The swine flu (or H1N1 virus) outbreak in the U.S., Mexico, and around the globe has triggered a no-holds-barred public health campaign to stop the spread of infection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued strong guidance on how people can protect themselves from contracting swine flu, and this guidance has been echoed by our public leaders—from Director of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano to President Barack Obama. Chief among the list of precautionary measures: workers should stay home from work if they experience symptoms, and keep sick children out of school, to limit contact with others and reduce the spread of the virus.

Unfortunately, although this very common-sense recommendation has been identified as the #1 tool for fighting a swine flu pandemic, it is not a real option for millions of workers. For these workers, staying home from work could result in loss of pay, discipline from an employer, or even loss of a job, because the U.S. has no law guaranteeing workers the right to paid sick days. Nearly half (47%) of the private sector workforce does not have a single paid sick day. What's more, nearly four in five low wage workers lack paid sick days. And one third of workers—nearly 100 million people—don't have a single paid sick day they can use to care for a sick child.

As a result, millions of workers in this country simply cannot afford to stay home when they are sick, or when a child is sick, because doing so puts their paychecks - and their jobs - at risk. With unemployment rates skyrocketing and families struggling to make ends meet, hang onto their homes and manage rising credit card debt, the risks associated with staying home to cope with illness are just too great. Many know from personal experience the consequences of not coming to work; in a survey commissioned by the Public Welfare Foundation last year, one in six respondents reported that they or a family member had been fired, suspended, punished or threatened with being fired for taking time off due to personal illness or to care for a sick child or relative.

That's why this is a vital moment when Congress and the Administration should make a real commitment to our nation's workers, and our nation's health, by guaranteeing a minimum standard of paid sick days, so workers can follow the CDC's recommendations. Representative Rosa DeLauro and Senator Ted Kennedy will reintroduce the Healthy Families Act in May, to allow workers to earn up to seven paid sick days per year to recover from illness or care for a sick family member. We need this law, now more than ever.

The Chorus of "Stay at Home" Quotes from the Administration

The Administration has been repeating sound advice to people potentially infected with the swine flu virus: stay at home when symptoms occur. But taking this advice is impossible for millions of workers who do not have job-protected paid sick days.

- **Dr. Richard Besser, the Acting Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
If you're sick, it's very important that people **stay at home**. If your children are sick, have a fever and flu-like illness, they shouldn't go to school. And if you're ill, you shouldn't get on an airplane or another public transport to travel. Those things are part of personal responsibility in trying to reduce the impact.
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Press-Briefing-On-Swine-Influenza-4/26/09/

- **Robert Gibbs, White House Press Secretary**
Clearly we all have individual responsibility for dealing with this situation. We should all be practicing good hygienic practices, such as hand-washing on a regular basis; if you feel sick, **it makes sense to stay home**; and then also following the other practices that are common sense when we deal with an outbreak of flu every year.
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Press-Briefing-On-Swine-Influenza-4/26/09/
- **Secretary Janet Napolitano, Department of Homeland Security**
And again, the government can't solve this alone. We need everybody in the United States to take some responsibility here. **If you are sick, stay home.** Wash your hands, take all of those reasonable measures; that will help us mitigate, contain how many people actually get sick in our country.
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Press-Briefing-On-Swine-Influenza-4/26/09/
- **President Barack Obama**
100 Days Press Conference
<http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2009/04/30/transcript-of-obamas-100th-day-press-conference/?mod=washwire>)

The key now I think is to make sure that we are maintaining great vigilance, that everybody responds appropriately when cases do come up. And individual families start taking very sensible precautions that can make a huge difference. So wash your hands when you shake hands. Cover your mouth when you cough. I know it sounds trivial, but it makes a huge difference. **If you are sick, stay home. If your child is sick, keep them out of school.** If you are feeling certain flu symptoms, don't get on an airplane. Don't get on any system of public transportation where you're confined and you could potentially spread the virus.

Weekly Address: Government Actions to Address the H1N1 Flu Virus (May 2, 2009)

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/05/01/Weekly-Address-Government-Actions-to-Address-the-H1N1-Flu-Virus/>

In his Weekly Address, the President discussed the U.S. government's response to the flu virus:

This is also why the Centers for Disease Control has recommended that schools and child care facilities with confirmed cases of the virus close for up to fourteen days. **It is why we urge employers to allow infected employees to take as many sick days as necessary.** If more schools are forced to close, we've also recommended that both parents and businesses think about contingency plans if children do have to stay home. We have asked every American to take the same steps you would take to prevent any other flu: keep your hands washed; cover your mouth when you cough; **stay home from work if you're sick; and keep your children home from school if they're sick.** And the White House has launched pages in Facebook, MySpace and Twitter to support the ongoing efforts by the CDC to update the public as quickly and effectively as possible.