



TFAH Supports the Healthy Families Act; Sick and Family Leave Measures in Bill Would Be Critical for Containing a Possible Pandemic Flu Outbreak

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Washington, D. C., February 13, 2007 – The following is a statement by Jeff Levi, PhD, Executive Director of Trust for America's Health (TFAH):

“People shouldn't have to choose between protecting the health of their families and a paycheck during a crisis. The sick and family leave measures proposed in the Healthy Families Act, as introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), are important for ensuring that all Americans, regardless of their economic status, could take time off when they are sick or to care for family members. But the proposed sick and family leave policies are also essential for containing the spread of infectious disease and limiting the risk of illness during public health emergencies.

Currently, 59 million workers in the U.S. do not have paid sick leave. Eighty-six million workers do not have paid sick leave that they can use to care for immediate family members. Three out of four 'low-wage' workers have no sick leave at all.

One of the biggest current threats to our nation's health is a possible pandemic flu outbreak. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is proposing that individuals who might become ill during a pandemic should stay home from work until they are fully recovered (an estimated 10 days), and that household members of those who are sick should also stay home while the individual is sick until it is clear that the household member has not become ill, which is known as voluntary home quarantine. The CDC has also suggested that schools could potentially close for 12 weeks during a pandemic, leading parents and guardians to struggle with managing child care issues during that time frame.

Compliance with public health recommendations will be critical during the first wave of a pandemic, when vaccines would not yet be widely available. The minimum seven days of paid sick leave a year that employees could use to meet their own medical needs or care for sick family members would allow people to meet most of the minimum requirement for recuperation and family care during a pandemic. TFAH also encourages employers to plan for a possible pandemic, and create tiered sick leave plans to allow for more time off during a public health crisis, when designated by the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services.”

Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.
www.healthyamericans.org and www.pandemicfluandyou.org

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