



Mobilizing Action Toward
Community Health (MATCH)
University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

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New Report: *Healthy Workers, Thriving Wisconsin: Solutions Addressing Lack Of Income As A Barrier To COVID-19 Isolation And Quarantine*

Report Reveals That Access To Paid Sick Leave And Other Policies Could Reduce The Spread Of The Pandemic By 10,000 Cases Each Month

Madison, Wis.—With COVID-19 cases surging in Wisconsin and across the country, identifying evidence-based solutions that could contribute to controlling the pandemic is crucial for the health of both Wisconsinites and the state's economy. *Healthy Workers, Thriving Wisconsin: Solutions Addressing Lack Of Income As A Barrier To COVID-19 Isolation And Quarantine* assesses how the following practices could impact COVID-19 spread:

- Paid sick leave policies
- Changing workers' compensation so that when workers have been infected with COVID-19, if they were exposed in the workplace, the rebuttable presumption is that they were infected there
- Direct payments to informal sector workers, including gig workers and undocumented workers—who would likely not have access to paid sick leave and workers' compensation—when they need to isolate and/or quarantine

One in five U.S. workers are exposed to the virus at their workplace at least once per month, and one in ten are exposed at least once per week. With over 600,000 Wisconsin workers lacking regular access to paid sick leave, the report finds access to paid sick days would significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19 in Wisconsin in early 2021, potentially by an estimated 10,000 cases and over 75 lives saved *each month*.

“Workers in Wisconsin have been forced into a lose-lose situation,” said Paula Tran Inzeo, Mobilizing Action for Community Health (MATCH) Group Director at the UW Population Health Institute. “They can either go to work when infected with COVID-19, risking spreading it to customers and coworkers, in order to earn the income they need to pay for their basic necessities. Or they can stay home to isolate or quarantine, but not be able to pay their rent or

their heating bill, or buy food for their family. Forcing workers to make this impossible choice has resulted in thousands of workplace outbreaks in Wisconsin. This is preventable.”

The policies analyzed would help ensure workers in Wisconsin do not have a disruption in income when they need to isolate and/or quarantine when they are infected with or have been exposed to COVID-19, thereby contributing to slowing the spread of the virus in the state.

“Decades of research have shown that access to paid sick leave has a wide variety of significant positive impacts on health, from reduced emergency room usage to reduced spread of food-borne illness through restaurants and gastrointestinal disease through nursing homes,” said Jonathan Heller, Senior Health Equity Fellow at the UW Population Health Institute. “Paid sick leave is a vital policy when trying to control a pandemic. Studies also show that providing paid sick days doesn’t have much of an impact on businesses.”

While there is less research about their impact, the report also explains how expanding workers’ comp and providing direct payments to those that can’t access either paid sick leave or workers’ comp are also critical components of controlling the spread of COVID-19 through worksites.

“Controlling the pandemic and reopening the economy both depend on protecting workers,” Heller continued. “The health of the public and the health of the economy are intertwined. We are a stronger, thriving Wisconsin when everyone has what they need to be safe and well, and these policies would help get us there.”

To download the full report, visit:

https://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/316/2021/01/HealthyWorkersThrivingWisconsin_FullReport.pdf

For the executive summary, visit:

https://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/316/2021/01/HealthyWorkersThrivingWisconsin_ExecSummary_FINAL.pdf

The Population Health Institute will hold a webinar about the report findings and with stories from impacted workers on February 15 at 12pm CT. To register for the webinar, visit:

https://uwmadison.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_jh3VMzoZTUKPozUF8cYipw.

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The [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu) advances health and well-being for all by developing and evaluating interventions and promoting evidence-based approaches to policy and practice at the local, state, and national levels. The Institute works across the full spectrum of factors that contribute to health. A focal point for health and health care dialogue within the University of Wisconsin-Madison and beyond, and a convener of stakeholders, the Institute promotes an exchange of expertise between those in academia and those in the policy and practice arena. For more information, visit <http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu>.