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Releases

# We can’t afford to wait. It’s time for paid sick leave for every worker in Canada.

*Joint Statement by Canada’s Provincial and Territorial Federations of Labour:*

In advance of the federal, provincial and territorial labour ministers’ meeting, provincial and territorial federations of labour are united in demanding that provincial and territorial governments guarantee seamless access to universal, permanent and adequate employer-provided sick days for all workers.

More than half of all Canadian workers have no access to paid sick leave. When they’re sick, they face an impossible choice between making ends meet and staying home to protect public health and get better. It’s a decision nobody should have to make.

Workplace outbreaks and transmissions during the COVID-19 pandemic have made it clear that paid sick leave is critical to protecting public health. Yet the gaps in coverage are huge, especially among low-wage workers. There’s an urgent need for immediate government action — especially with new, highly-contagious variants now spreading through our population.

It’s a public health imperative that sick workers stay home from work, and not just during the pandemic. Illnesses like influenza cause thousands of hospitalizations and deaths in Canada every year. By curbing the spread of infectious diseases, employer-provided sick days would protect public health while increasing workplace productivity, offering more stable income for workers and reducing

health costs for governments.

The Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit is a small step forward, but it falls far short of what is needed. It's temporary by design and restricted to COVID-related illness. It interrupts workers' income, making them apply and then wait for the benefit to arrive. And the benefit itself only replaces a fraction of lost pay for many workers. While this new benefit helps, it isn't universal and permanent paid sick leave.

Initially, some level of government support may be needed to offset costs for small and medium-sized businesses that have been severely affected by the pandemic. But the ultimate goal, in every province and territory, must be to ensure that every worker knows that when they are sick, they will not pay a financial penalty for doing the right thing and staying home to protect public health.

Public support for employer-provided sick days is strong throughout Canada. The need has never been more apparent or more urgent. We call on Canada's labour ministers to prioritize the implementation of universal, permanent and adequate employer-provided paid sick leave for all workers now.

*This joint statement is being distributed on behalf the Alberta Federation of Labour, British Columbia Federation of Labour, Manitoba Federation of Labour, New Brunswick Federation of Labour, Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, Ontario Federation of Labour, Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and Yukon Federation of Labour.*