

PAID FAMILY LEAVE



Most Americans will face the demands of having a baby, developing a serious illness, or needing to care for a sick loved one at some point in their lives. In those cases, retaining some level of income can mean the difference between being able to maintain stability and financial independence versus facing the challenges of having no income to support themselves and their loved ones.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) requires private employers with at least 50 employees and all government agencies regardless of number of employees to offer 12 weeks of leave for childbirth, adoption, or the serious illness of one's self or a close relative. However, that leave is not required to be paid, which represents a significant financial burden for most Americans. According to recent studies, fewer than 60 percent of U.S. workers have access to FMLA leave,¹ and many cannot afford to take it.

Paid Family Leave Systems

March of Dimes supports the establishment of paid family leave systems that make benefits available to all workers while also distributing the responsibility for funding this system among employers. Such systems recognize that society shares an obligation to support new families as well as individuals who are sick themselves or need to care for others.

An international evaluation of paid leave policies showed that for every increase of 10 weeks of paid maternity leave, there was a 10% lower neonatal and infant mortality rate and a 9% lower rate of mortality in children under age 5, even after controlling for other known risk factors for infant and child death.²

In California, an evaluation of the state's Paid Family Leave (PFL) policy reported that the median duration of breastfeeding doubled for all new mothers who used PFL.⁴ California's policy applies to nearly all employers regardless of business size. In addition, the overwhelming majority of businesses reported positive or no impact of PFL on productivity (88.5%).³

Paid family leave systems already exist in California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Washington, New York and D.C., and bills have been introduced in other states.

HIGHLIGHTS

- March of Dimes supports paid family leave systems that make benefits available to all workers while also distributing the funding responsibility among employers.
- Lack of paid leave after childbirth, adoption or a serious illness represents a significant financial burden for most Americans.
- Fewer than 60% of US workers have access to FMLA leave.
- Paid leave is associated with better birth outcomes and greater duration of breastfeeding.

References

¹US Department of Labor. Wage and Hour Division. [FMLA Survey Fact Sheet](#).

²Heyman J, Raub A, Earle A. [Creating and Using New Data Sources to Analyze the Relationship Between Social Policy and Global Health: The Case of Maternal Leave](#). *Public Health Reports*. 2011;126(Suppl 3): 127-134.

³Applebaum E, Milkman R. [Leaves that Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California](#), 2011.