Back to School for Working Parents

COVID turned all of our lives upside down. And with school starting up again, parents and teachers need to know how to protect their children and themselves - both from COVID and from losing their jobs and income.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) passed by Congress in March 2020 offers some workers paid sick days and paid family leave until December 31, 2020. This program is available for workers whose employers remain open during the pandemic.

Some cities and states have additional paid sick days and paid family and medical leave laws - you can learn about these laws on our website. Teachers can learn more about their rights here.

We know not every worker is covered by these programs. They should be. Please contact Family Values @ Work to learn more about these programs and how you can advocate for all workers and to share your story.

Here’s what you need to know about FFCRA

You qualify for FFCRA if your workplace remains open, you can’t telework, and you work for:

- A government or public employer
  - If you work for the federal government, you qualify for federal paid sick days, but you probably cannot use federal emergency paid leave.
- A private employer with under 500 employees, including part-time workers*
- If you are a gig employee or are self-employed

You can take federal paid sick days (up to 80 hours over two weeks) if:

- You think you have COVID and you need to get tested or seen by a doctor.
- A health care provider told you to self-quarantine because you have COVID, have symptoms, or are especially vulnerable to COVID.
- You are under a federal, state, or local quarantine or isolation order.
- You are complying with recommendations from a public health official.
- You are caring for an individual who is self-isolating because they have COVID, have symptoms, or are especially vulnerable to COVID.
- You are caring for your child if their school or place of care is closed, or if the person who usually takes care of your child is not available because of COVID.

If you are caring for your child while their school or place of care is closed because of COVID, you can receive an additional 10 weeks of emergency paid leave for a total of 12 weeks of time.

When using time to care for themselves, workers receive full pay, up to $511 per day or $5,111 total. Workers caring for loved ones or children out of school earn 2/3rds of their pay, up to $200 per day. Workers cannot be forced to use personal sick time before using FFCRA paid sick days.

*If you work for a health care or emergency responder, they may have an exemption from the federal government from this policy. If you work for a business of 50 people or fewer, your employer may have an exemption ONLY for leave when COVID closes your child’s school or place of care. Check with your employer or learn more.

All information in this factsheet assumes that you qualify for FFCRA and have not used all of your time. Contact Family Values @ Work for more information or visit our website to share your story - familyvaluesatwork.org
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What happens if my child has to do remote school but I have to work? Can I use federal paid sick days or emergency paid leave if the school is open but operating virtually?

You can use the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) paid sick days or emergency paid leave to care for your child when school is closed. According to the Department of Labor, your child’s school is considered closed if they must use online instruction or otherwise complete assignments at home.

You can also talk to your employer about accommodations, including changing your schedule to work from home or to work different hours so someone else could care for your children safely.

What do I do if my child’s school has in-person schooling, but I need to keep them home because they are high-risk or a member of our household is high risk?

If you need to quarantine to protect a child or household member who is at high-risk, you should be eligible for up to 80 hours of federal paid sick time over a 2 week period.

Emergency paid leave is only available to care for children when their usual school or childcare is closed. Since your child’s school is in-person, the school is considered open. You may want to see if your city or state has additional laws that can help you.

My child has in-person schooling, but I don’t feel comfortable sending them (even though no one has been told to quarantine or is at high risk). Can I use FFCRA time to care for them at home?

Unfortunately, FFCRA time is only available when a child’s school is closed. Since your child’s school is in-person, the school is considered open. This is true if the school offers all education onsite or if you have a choice between virtual and in-person. See below if your school is only open in-person part of the time.

My child only needs to be supervised part of the day (for instance, another adult is available sometimes, or my child’s school is in-person some days). Do I need to take paid sick days or emergency paid leave all at once, or can I use it in smaller pieces?

If you are using federal paid sick days or emergency paid leave to take care of children because school is closed, you can use it intermittently for up to 12 weeks total. You can only use the time when school is closed and when there is no other suitable adult available to care for your children. (A new court ruling says that you do not need employer consent to use the time intermittently.)

I'm having trouble finding or affording childcare. I can't use FFCRA.

If you do not qualify for FFCRA, or if it is not an option for other reasons, you may want to look at childcare.gov for specific COVID advice or to find childcare. Be sure to check whether your state has any local or state laws or funds that can help.

My child is in daycare. What happens if that daycare has to close because a student tests positive?

You can use federal paid sick days or emergency paid leave until the place of care reopens.

All information in this factsheet assumes that you qualify for FFCRA and have not used all of your time.

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