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, Parents can learn more about their rights here. If you are part of a union, you should also contact your representative to see what is covered in your contract.

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
  - Employees of a publicly funded school/college are considered government employees.
  - 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 private schools and part-time work*
- 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.
If a student in my class gets COVID-19 and I have to isolate for 14 days, do I have to use my personal sick days? What happens if another student tests positive a month later and I've burned through all of my emergency paid sick days but still have to isolate for 14 days?

You should be covered by FFCRA for up to 80 hours of paid sick time over 2 weeks. If you receive a negative COVID test before the two weeks are up, you can return to work and stop the clock on your time. You cannot be required to use personal sick days before using FFCRA or at the same time as FFCRA sick days. You may want to see if your city or state has additional laws that can help you.

Beyond this, there is little guidance on what to do. However, the CDC recommends that schools make it easy for staff to stay home if they are showing symptoms or came into close contact with someone who shows symptoms.

If I have to self isolate, am I required to teach online?

You and your employer can determine how best to handle this situation. FFCRA is not available to employees who are able to telework. However, if telework is not an option, FFCRA should be available for up to 80 hours of paid sick time over 2 weeks.

Being able to telework goes beyond whether or not your work can be done from home. If you are too ill to work, if you are caring for others who must also self-isolate, or if you have other restrictions that prevent teleworking, you should be able to use FFCRA.

I’m a teacher and I am expected to report for school in person. But my child has to attend school remotely some days/every day. What can I do?

One option is to use the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) paid sick days or emergency paid leave to care for your child on days they report remotely. According to the Department of Labor, your child’s school is considered closed if they must use online instruction or any model where they complete assignments at home. You do not have to use the time all at once, so if your child is remote learning only on certain days, you can use the leave on those days.

You can also talk to your employer about potential accommodations, including working from home.

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.

What if I work at a small private school, can I get federal paid sick days?

As long as you work for a qualifying employer (see above), you should be able to use federal paid sick days for COVID related purposes.