

High cost for not offering paid sick leave

By Austin Frakt, San Francisco Chronicle

Each week about 1.5 million Americans without paid sick leave go to work despite feeling ill. At least half of employees of restaurants and hospitals – two settings where disease is easily spread – go to work when they have a cold or the flu, according to a recent poll.

To address that issue, Chipotle began offering paid sick leave to all its U.S. employees this year. The chain is hoping to reduce the spread of infectious disease – like the norovirus outbreaks traced to its restaurants last year and earlier this year. Although many industrialized countries already require employers to offer paid sick leave to all employees, the United States does not.

Paid sick leave is not free, of course. Economic theory suggests that its cost would be passed from employers to employees in the form of lower wages or reductions in other benefits. Yet employees and their co-workers may be better off with an incentive to take time off when sick.

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