

Paid Sick Leave Policy

Policy · US · Updated 2026-08-09 · Square brackets are placeholders to replace with your own details.

A paid sick leave policy is the written statement of how employees earn and use paid time off when they are sick or need medical care — how sick time accrues or is granted up front, what it can be used for, how to request it, and what happens to unused hours. In the US there is no general federal paid-sick-leave law, so this one document does two jobs: it defines the benefit where no law requires one, and it carries the compliance load in the growing list of states and cities that mandate paid sick leave.

Unwritten sick leave fails in both directions at once. Employees who do not know what they are entitled to come to work ill — and hand the bug to the rest of the team — while managers improvise different answers for different people, which is how a health benefit turns into a fairness complaint. And for any employer with people in more than one state, the patchwork of state and city mandates makes the ad-hoc approach a compliance problem, not just a culture one.

This template gives you the complete policy: who is covered, how sick time is earned (with accrual and up-front placeholders you set), what the time can be used for, the request procedure, carryover, the state-compliance section a single-state policy quietly lacks, and the anti-retaliation commitment every sick-leave law expects to see in writing.

Purpose and scope

This policy explains how paid sick leave works at [Your company]: how sick time is earned, what it can be used for, how to request it, and what happens to unused balances. It applies to [all employees, including part-time and temporary staff / describe covered groups] — note that state sick-leave laws typically cover part-time and temporary employees, so narrow eligibility only where the law where you operate allows it.

Where a state or local law provides more than this policy, the law wins: employees receive the most generous provision that applies to their work location. The state and local compliance section below explains how [Your company] manages that.

How sick time is earned

Choose one of the two structures below and delete the other. Both are common, and state laws generally allow either — as long as the totals meet the mandate where each employee works.

- **Accrual:** employees earn [number] hour(s) of paid sick leave for every [number] hours worked, starting [on the first day of employment], up to [number] hours per year. [State laws set minimum accrual rates and may limit any waiting period before use — take the figures from your state labor department.]
- **Up-front grant:** employees receive [number] hours of paid sick leave at the start of each [calendar year / benefit year], available immediately, prorated [method] for mid-year starters. [Frontloading can simplify or remove carryover obligations in some states — confirm before relying on that.]
- Sick time is paid at [the employee's regular rate of pay / describe the calculation for commission, piece-rate, and variable-hour staff — several state laws prescribe how the rate must be worked out].
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Current balances appear in [payroll system / on pay stubs] — some states require the available balance to be shown on or with each pay statement.

What sick leave can be used for

Employees may use sick leave for the purposes below. State laws set the minimum list, and several go further — where the law where an employee works covers more reasons or more family members than this policy, the law applies.

- The employee's own illness, injury, or health condition — including diagnosis, treatment, recovery, and preventive care such as medical, dental, and optical appointments.
- Caring for a family member with any of the above. Family means [spouse or domestic partner; child; parent; sibling; grandparent; grandchild; a member of the employee's household] — state laws define family for sick-leave purposes, often broadly, so use at least your state's definition.
- Safe time: absences arising from domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking affecting the employee [or a family member] — such as medical care, counseling, relocation, or legal proceedings. Many state sick-leave laws include these reasons, and the federal contractor rules do too.
- [Closure of the workplace, or of the employee's child's school or place of care, by order of a public official during a public-health emergency — include where your state's law covers it.]
- Sick leave is for the purposes above — it is not extra vacation. Patterns that suggest misuse are handled through [the attendance policy], but never by blocking or punishing legitimate protected use.

Requesting and using sick leave

1. For unforeseeable illness, tell [your manager / the duty manager] via [phone/system] as soon as practical — state laws limit how much notice an employer can demand when the need could not be foreseen.
2. For foreseeable appointments and planned treatment, request the time in advance through [system], and try to schedule where work disruption is lowest — try, not must.
3. Sick leave may be used in increments of [number] hour(s) — several state laws cap the minimum increment an employer may impose, so set this from your state's rules.
4. Documentation: [Your company] does not ask for documentation for absences of [number] consecutive days or fewer. For longer absences, [acceptable documentation, e.g. a provider's note confirming the absence]. A diagnosis is never required. Several state laws restrict when documentation can be demanded — set this threshold from the law where you operate, not from habit.
5. Record the absence against sick leave in [system] on your return, or ask your manager to record it for you.

Carryover, caps, and leaving the company

- Unused sick leave carries over to the next year up to [number] hours. [Total accrual may be capped at [number] hours, and use may be capped at [number] hours per year — state laws set minimums for all three figures, so fill them from your state, not another template.]
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[Your company] [does / does not] pay out unused sick leave when employment ends. Many state sick-leave laws do not require payout on separation — sick time is commonly treated differently from vacation — but a combined PTO bank can change the answer, so confirm with your state before finalizing this clause.

- [Some states require unused balances to be reinstated if an employee is rehired within a set period — check your state's rule and state yours here.]

State and local compliance

[Your company] complies with the paid-sick-leave law of every state and locality where it has employees, and where a mandate exceeds this policy, the mandate applies. States that currently require paid sick leave include California, New York, Washington, and Colorado; Illinois requires paid leave usable for any reason, sickness included; and a growing number of cities and counties layer local ordinances on top. Each law has its own accrual rate, caps, covered-employer thresholds, family definitions, notice rules, and documentation limits — this policy deliberately quotes none of them.

[HR/name/role] keeps a compliance note for every work location — including remote employees' home states — recording the applicable law, the figures that fill this policy's brackets, and any required postings and employee notices, and refreshes it [annually] and whenever a state labor department announces changes. The bracketed numbers in this policy are always set from those official sources, never copied from another state or another year.

No retaliation

No one at [Your company] will be disciplined, demoted, denied hours or shifts, or otherwise treated adversely for requesting or using sick leave under this policy or under any applicable law. State sick-leave laws prohibit retaliation — and this policy applies the same rule in every state, mandate or not. Sick leave used for a protected purpose never counts as an occurrence under [the attendance policy].

An employee who believes they have been retaliated against should report it to [HR/name], or through any channel in [the employee complaint policy]. Reports are investigated promptly, and employees always retain the right to complain to their state labor department.

Interaction with other leave and benefits

- Vacation and PTO: sick leave at [Your company] is [a separate bank / part of a combined PTO bank]. If combined, the bank must satisfy the sick-leave law's rules on accrual, permitted uses, carryover, and documentation for the sick portion — see [the PTO policy].
- Extended illness: absences that outlast sick balances may qualify for unpaid, job-protected leave under the FMLA where it applies, for [short-term disability benefits], or for a state paid family and medical leave program — see [the FMLA and family leave policy] and route these to [HR/name] early.
- Disability: where a condition is also a disability, the ADA may require leave or schedule changes as a reasonable accommodation beyond anything in this policy — exhausted sick balances do not end that conversation.

- Work-related injury or illness is handled under workers' compensation; time off after a death is covered by [the bereavement leave policy].

Records and review

Sick-leave accruals, use, and balances are recorded in [payroll system] and retained for [period] — several state laws set minimum retention periods for sick-leave records. This policy is reviewed [frequency, e.g. annually], and immediately whenever a state or locality where [Your company] operates changes its rules. Owner: [name/role]. Next review due: [date].

How to use this template

1. List every state and city where you have employees — remote hires included — and pull the current sick-leave rules from each labor department before touching a single bracket.
2. Choose accrual or the up-front grant, then fill the rate, caps, and carryover from the strictest law that applies — one compliant tier for everyone is far easier to run than a policy per state.
3. Set the documentation threshold and check it against every applicable law — this is the clause employers most often write illegally.
4. Align the attendance policy so protected sick-leave use can never generate points, occurrences, or discipline.
5. Configure payroll to accrue, cap, and display balances exactly as the policy promises, and post any notices your states require.
6. Publish the policy in the handbook, cover it at onboarding, and diarize the review — sick-leave laws change most years.

Official guidance

- › [DOL — Sick leave](#)
- › [DOL — Paid sick leave for federal contractors \(EO 13706\)](#)
- › [California DIR — Paid sick leave](#)
- › [New York State — Paid sick leave](#)

This template is provided in good faith and for general information — it is not legal advice. Adapt it to your organisation and, where your sector carries specific legal requirements, have the finished document reviewed by a qualified adviser. The live version at <https://trainedteam.com/templates/paid-sick-leave-policy-us> is kept current; this file is a snapshot.