[Paid Sick Leave Catching on Across Canada](#)

written by vickyp | September 27, 2023

BC and the federal jurisdiction have given employees paid sick days and other provinces may soon follow.

Stay home when you're sick!

That's what employees have historically been advised to do, especially when they're sick with a contagious disease that could spread to others in the workplace. But while it may be sound advice, for employees struggling to make ends meet, staying home when you're sick is an unaffordable luxury to the extent it involves forfeiting a day's pay.

If you really want to keep employees from coming to work when they're sick, you gotta give them paid sick leave. The problem is that whatever sick days employment standards laws provide are unpaid. At least that was the case when the COVID-19 pandemic began. The lone exception was in PEI where employees are entitled to one day of paid sick leave per year after they've worked at a company for at least 5 years.

Pandemic & Paid Sick Leave

Paid sick leave has been a political issue, one that helped the Liberal Party capture the federal election in 2015 and hang onto power in 2021. But it was the COVID-19 pandemic that drove real change. BC and Ontario revised their ESA laws to provide for [paid leave during the public health emergency](#) so that employees really could stay home when they were sick and not subject their colleagues to risk of COVID infection. Alberta, BC, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan also [provided paid leave so that employees could get vaccinated](#) during work hours.

In each case, the provincial government offered subsidies to help employers defray the costs of paid sick leave—typically of up to $600 per employee to defray 3 days of paid sick leave. Rather than changing their employment standards law, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island adopted a different approach of making paid COVID sick days voluntary while offering subsidies to employers who chose to participate.

The New Rise of Permanent Paid Sick Leave

While representing a step in the right direction, these measures were only temporary. When the pandemic ended, so did paid sick leave days. Rather than go back to the status quo, a few provinces chose to make paid sick leave permanent for illnesses like COVID that are subject to an actual public health emergency order or mandatory quarantine while leaving sick days for routine illnesses unpaid.

However, there were two notable exceptions. In 2022, BC became the first province to make paid sick leave permanent, providing employees [5 days of paid leave](#) for any personal injury or illness, not just emergency or highly commutable illnesses. The [federal government](#) upped the ante by passing legislation (Bill C-3) allowing employees to accrue 1 day of paid sick leave per month up to 10 days per year.

Meanwhile, bills to make paid sick leave permanent have been introduced in several other jurisdictions, including New Brunswick, Ontario, PEI and Saskatchewan. However, because the proposed legislation was Private Member bills, none of these efforts have so far come to fruition. It will almost surely require a government bill for permanent paid leave to win passage. Go to the HR Insider website for a summary of the current sick leave laws in each part of Canada.