



### Consensus Statement on Paid Sick Leave for Healthcare Personnel in Montana

*Montana Public Health* occasionally publishes consensus statements that support the mission of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS). In October 2013, “Consensus Statement on Required Influenza Immunization of All Healthcare Personnel in Montana” was published. In this issue, we present a consensus statement created by the Montana Healthcare-associated Infection Prevention Initiative (MTHAIPi) roundtable on providing paid sick leave to healthcare personnel (HCP) in Montana. This statement is endorsed by several healthcare organizations and aligns with current DPHHS activities to decrease healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) in Montana.

**Summary:** All HCP in Montana should be offered paid sick leave for potentially communicable illnesses.

#### Background:

- An estimated 722,000 HAIs occurred in U.S. acute care hospitals in 2011.
- HAIs cost U.S. hospitals up to an estimated \$34 billion annually.
- Approximately one-third of HAIs are preventable.
- HCP have been implicated in the nosocomial transmission of pertussis, norovirus, influenza, and other infectious diseases.
- HCP often work while ill with communicable diseases, a practice known as ‘presenteeism’. Presenteeism decreases worker productivity and increases the likelihood of disease transmission in healthcare settings, and subsequent HAIs.
- Numerous factors probably contribute to HCP working while ill, including: (a) concern about the delivery of patient care in the worker’s absence, (b) perception of weakness or laziness by other HCP, (c) previous interactions with supervisors who questioned legitimacy of illness, (d) understaffing, (e) burdening co-workers if absent, (f) job insecurity, and (g) lack of paid sick leave.
- Healthcare facilities often offer HCP paid time off but not paid sick leave. In this instance, HCP can use paid time off for vacation or sick leave. However, without a paid sick leave policy, HCP might choose to work while ill rather than reduce available vacation days.

- Limited published data suggest decreasing presenteeism reduces the potential to infect other HCP and patients.
- The availability of unrestricted paid sick leave has been associated with a decreased rate of presenteeism, but does not eliminate the practice.

#### Recommendations:

- Each healthcare facility in Montana should provide paid sick leave for all HCP who might be ill with a potential communicable illness that could negatively impact the health of patients, other HCP, or visitors. In so doing, HCP would have greater incentive to not work while ill.
- Examples of symptoms that could be considered indicators of a potential communicable illness include but are not limited to fever, chills, muscle aches, fatigue, nasal discharge, cough, vomiting, diarrhea, and rash.
- Each healthcare facility in Montana should implement policies that encourage HCP to remain at home while ill. For example, policies to exclude HCP from work for a minimum amount of time from symptom resolution, and ensuring adequate staffing of HCP to limit feelings of potential burdensomeness that can be associated with presenteeism.

## Endorsed by:

*Montana Healthcare Associated Infection Prevention Initiative (MHAIFI) Roundtable on May 13, 2014*

*Montana Infectious Disease Society on August 8, 2014*

*Joshua Christensen, MD*

*Ray Geyer, DO*

*David Graham, MD*

*Fred Kahn, MD*

*Camille Saberhagen, MD*

*Don Skillman, MD*

*Jeffrey Tjaden, MD*

*Claude Tonnerre, MD*

*Les Whitney, MD*

*Mark D. Winton, MD*

*Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics on October 5, 2014*

*Montana Chapter of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology on October 6, 2014*

*Montana Primary Care Association on November 21, 2014*

*Montana Nurses Association on January 19, 2015*

## Recommendations concerning paid sick leave for healthcare personnel in Montana

- Each healthcare facility in Montana should develop a policy that allows all healthcare personnel (HCP) to receive paid sick leave for potential communicable illnesses.
- Each healthcare facility in Montana should implement policies that support HCP remaining at home while ill with potentially communicable illnesses (e.g., pertussis, norovirus, influenza, etc.).

## References

1. Magill SS, Edwards JR, Bamberg W, et al. Multistate point-prevalence survey of healthcare-associated infections. *N Engl J Med.* 2014;370:1198–1208.
2. Scott DR. The direct medical costs of healthcare-associated infections in U.S. hospitals and the benefits of prevention. [http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/pdfs/hai/Scott\\_CostPaper.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/pdfs/hai/Scott_CostPaper.pdf) [Accessed April 25, 2014].
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthcare-associated infections. <http://www.cdc.gov/hai/> [Accessed April 28, 2014].
4. Widera E, Chang A, Chen HL. Presenteeism: a public health hazard. *J Gen Intern Med.* 2010;25(11):1244–7.
5. LaVela S, Goldstein B, Smith B, Weaver FM. Working with symptoms of a respiratory infection: staff who care for high-risk individuals. *Am J Infect Control.* 2007;35(7):448–54.

---

1,953 copies of this public document were published at an estimated cost of \$0.67 per copy, for a total cost of \$1,308.51 which includes \$429.66 for printing and \$878.85 for distribution.