



Paid Sick Leave for Employees in BC

PANEL SURVEY REPORT
BC MINISTRY OF LABOUR

R.A. MALATEST & ASSOCIATES LTD.



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BACKGROUND

Sick Leave in British Columbia

Currently, employees in B.C. are entitled to up to three days of unpaid, job-protected sick leave per year. This leave is intended to help protect employees from job loss or other repercussions at work in cases where they cannot work due to illness or injury. To be entitled to this leave, an employee must have worked for their employer for at least 90 days. Additionally, employers may require employees provide information to satisfy their employer that they are ill or injured; it is acceptable practice for employers to require a doctor's note to get access to this sick leave.

COVID-19 and Paid Sick Leave

Due to the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, public health orders were put in place requiring individuals to self-isolate if they were diagnosed with COVID-19 and/or if they were exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19. To support these public health orders and reduce the financial incentive to ignore these requirements, the B.C. government introduced legislation that required employers to offer up to three paid sick days if an employee needed to stay home due to COVID-19 related issues (e.g., diagnosed with COVID-19, awaiting COVID-19 test results, needing to self-isolate and monitor due to an exposure, etc.).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the public good that is served when an ill employee stays home from the workplace: the spread of contagious illness, and thus the burden of disease, is reduced. As a result of this experience, the B.C. government is exploring options to mandate employer-paid sick leave for any illness or injury, not just COVID-19 specific issues.

Purpose of the *Paid Sick Leave Engagement*

To provide a base level of knowledge regarding what types of sick leave are currently available to British Columbians at their workplaces, the B.C. Ministry of Labour undertook a public engagement consisting of a panel survey of employees, and two open online surveys of employees and employers.

This document reports on the findings of the panel survey portion of the public engagement. The purpose of the panel survey was to provide a randomly sampled, representative snapshot of sick leave among British Columbians. The following sections outline the methods employed for this panel survey, and the key findings from respondents.

METHODOLOGY

Use of a Panel Survey

While open online surveys are a useful public engagement tool to understand public sentiment from motivated members of the general population, there was a need in this project to understand the average or typical types of sick leave available to British Columbians. To avoid soliciting input only from those who have very strong feelings on paid sick leave (on either side of the issue), a panel survey was also conducted to ensure a random sampling of British Columbians

Survey Responses and Demographics

In total, 2,049 individuals participated in the online panel survey; of these, 1,879 were full survey completions and an additional 170 were partial completions.¹

Survey respondents were largely representative of the overall population of B.C.; based on Statistics Canada's *Labour Force Survey* estimates, the panel sample closely approximated B.C.'s workforce in terms of regional and age representation (see **Tables 1** and **2** below).

Table 1 – Panel Sample and BC Population, by Region

Region	Labour Force n	Labour Force %	Sample n	Sample %
Vancouver Island / Coast	396,500	16%	405	22%
Mainland / Southwest	1,570,700	63%	1,103	60%
Thompson-Okanagan	285,900	11%	188	10%
Kootenay	77,200	3%	44	2%
Cariboo	82,200	3%	43	2%
North Coast & Nechako	40,600	2%	49	3%
Northeast	38,000	2%	21	1%

Table 2 – Panel Sample and BC Population, by Age²

Age Group	Labour Force n	Labour Force %	Sample n	Sample %
Under 44 years	1,573,000	59%	1,069	56%
45 to 64 years	976,300	36%	721	38%
65+ years	137,200	5%	128	7%

Women were overrepresented in the survey sample; they represented approximately 62% of the panel sample, but account for 47% of the total B.C. workforce. **Table 3** below summarizes overall representation by gender.

¹ Due to partial completions and skipped questions, valid *ns* for survey items may vary throughout this report.

² Age groups have been collapsed to align with categories reported by Statistics Canada in their *Labour Force Survey* estimates.

Table 3 – Panel Sample and BC Population, by Gender

Gender Group	Labour Force n	Labour Force %	Sample n	Sample %
Male	1,503,500	53%	714	37%
Female	1,339,700	47%	1,195	62%
Gender fluid, non-binary, and/or Two-Spirit	-	-	7	0%

To compensate for this overrepresentation of women and underrepresentation of men in the panel survey sample, we applied post hoc proportional weights to increase the relative weight of male respondents' answers, and decrease the relative weight of female respondents' answers. As Statistics Canada does not publish estimates on the proportion of the workforce that is gender fluid, non-binary, or two-spirit, we were not able to estimate an appropriate weight for these cases. Their relative weight was retained (i.e., given a weight of 1) in the sample to ensure that this group was not excluded from analysis. While this does likely result in an overrepresentation of this group in the sample, given that they accounted for only seven cases, it is very unlikely this will cause distortions in the overall data and accompanying analyses.

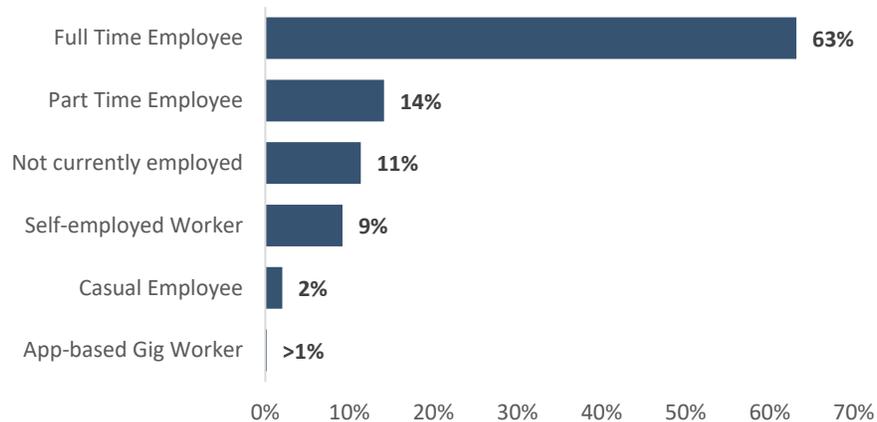
All findings reported in the following sections are based on weighted data.

WHAT WE HEARD

Employment Situation of Respondents

Slightly less than two-thirds of survey respondents were full-time employees; all other employee types each represented less than 15% of the sample.

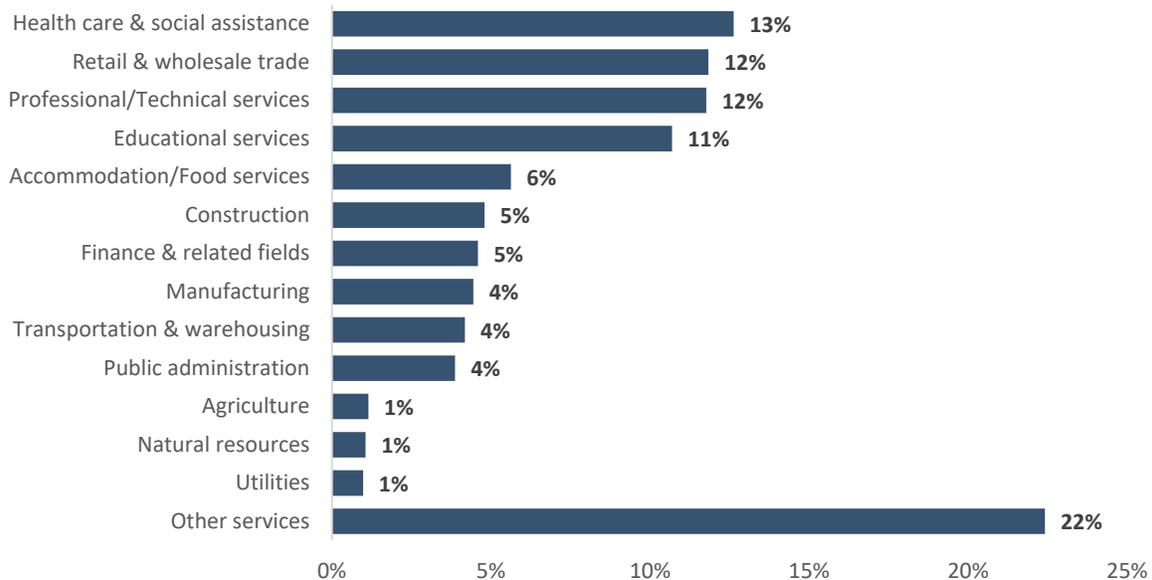
Figure 1 – Employment Situation of Respondents



Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid n=1,924

Approximately 14% of respondents (n=250) reported working for more than one employer; of these nearly all (75%, n=187) reported working for two employers, while 12% reported having three employers and 14% reported four or more employers.

All industries listed in the survey were represented among panel respondents; the most commonly reported industries were health care & social assistance (13%), professional and technical services and retail and wholesale (12% each), and educational services (11%). Slightly less than one-quarter of respondents (22%, n=434) reported their industry as “other services”.

Figure 2 – Industries of Respondents


Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid $n=1,935$

Respondents were asked to report their 2020 before-tax income from all jobs they worked that year (i.e., employment income only). Income brackets were based on Statistics Canada’s data on income deciles in B.C. (collapsed into quintiles for ease of answering for respondents); therefore, in the general population, each of the categories represents the employment income for approximately 20% of the population. **Table 4** below summarizes responses to this question.

Table 4 – Income Brackets of Panel Sample

Income Bracket	Frequency	Percent
\$24,000 or less	306	17%
Between \$24,001 and \$42,800	356	20%
Between \$42,801 and \$62,200	382	21%
Between \$62,201 and \$88,300	350	19%
\$88,301 or more	423	23%

Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid $n=1,817$

As can be seen in **Table 4**, there was some slight underrepresentation of lower income earners (\$24,000 or less annually) and some slight overrepresentation of higher income earners (\$88,301 or more annually).

The breakdown of income quintiles was not evenly distributed among industries; certain industries had higher proportions of individuals reporting very high and very low incomes. For example, the accommodation and food services industry had the highest proportion of respondents indicating they made less than \$24,000 in 2020, while the natural resources industry had the highest proportion of respondents indicating they earned \$88,301 or more in 2020. **Table 5** below summarizes the intersection of industry and income.

Table 5 – Income Brackets by Reported Industry

Industry / Sector Group	\$24,000 or less	Between \$24,001 and \$42,800	Between \$42,801 and \$62,200	Between \$62,201 and \$88,300	\$88,301 or more
Accommodation / Food services	34%	27%	21%	7%	11%
Agriculture	14%	5%	27%	41%	14%
Construction	13%	13%	22%	22%	30%
Educational services	11%	22%	20%	19%	27%
Finance & related fields	2%	16%	30%	22%	31%
Health care & social assistance	15%	21%	23%	21%	19%
Manufacturing	2%	16%	18%	34%	30%
Natural resources	10%	10%	10%	25%	45%
Professional/Technical services	7%	12%	18%	25%	37%
Public administration	4%	6%	32%	31%	26%
Retail & wholesale trade	23%	24%	19%	15%	19%
Transportation & warehousing	13%	18%	31%	18%	21%
Utilities	0%	28%	17%	33%	22%
Other services	30%	24%	18%	12%	16%
Overall	17%	20%	21%	19%	23%

Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*

Valid $n=1,817$

Approximately one-half of respondents (50%) worked for large-sized employers (i.e., more than 100 employees). A further 17% worked for medium-sized employers (i.e., 51 to 100 employees) while 28% reported working for small-sized employers (i.e., 50 or fewer employees). Six percent of respondents reported they were not sure how to categorize the size of their employer.

Slightly more than one-half of respondents (58%) reported working for a private-sector employer, while 28% worked for a public-sector employer. Seven percent of respondents reported that they worked for a non-profit employer, and seven percent reported being unsure of how to categorize their employer's general sector.

Slightly less than one-third of respondents (30%) reported that they were covered by a union contract, while 64% said they were not and 5% were unsure.

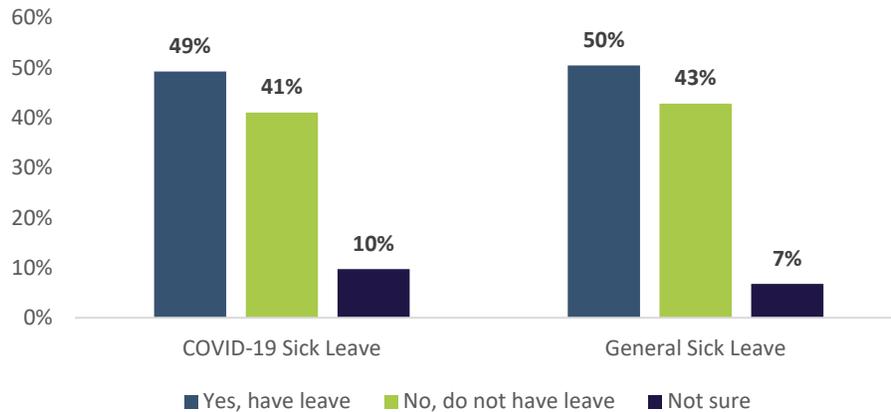
Current State of Paid Sick Leave in B.C.

Incidence of Paid Sick Leave

Despite being required by recent legislation, only approximately one-half of survey respondents reported that they had paid sick leave for COVID-19 related issues, similar to the proportion of respondents who reported having non-COVID-related sick leave.

There were no significant differences by gender with regard to entitlement to paid sick leave. Public sector employees were significantly more likely than private or non-profit sector employees to have access to paid sick leave (76% compared to 50% and 54%, respectively), as were employees who were covered by a union contract compared to non-union employees (75% compared to 48%).

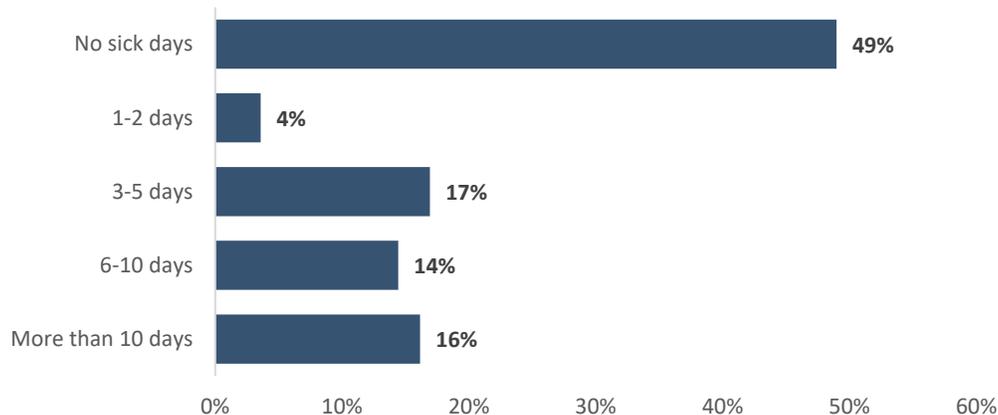
Figure 3 – Entitlement to Paid Sick Leave



Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid $n=1,922$ for COVID leave, $1,921$ for general leave

As highlighted in **Figure 4**, considering all respondents who reported on the availability of paid sick leave at their workplaces, nearly half (49%) reported they had no paid sick leave. Approximately one-third of respondents (30%) had access to six or more days of paid sick leave, while approximately one in five had access to between one and five days of paid sick leave.

Figure 4 – Number of Paid Sick Days Available



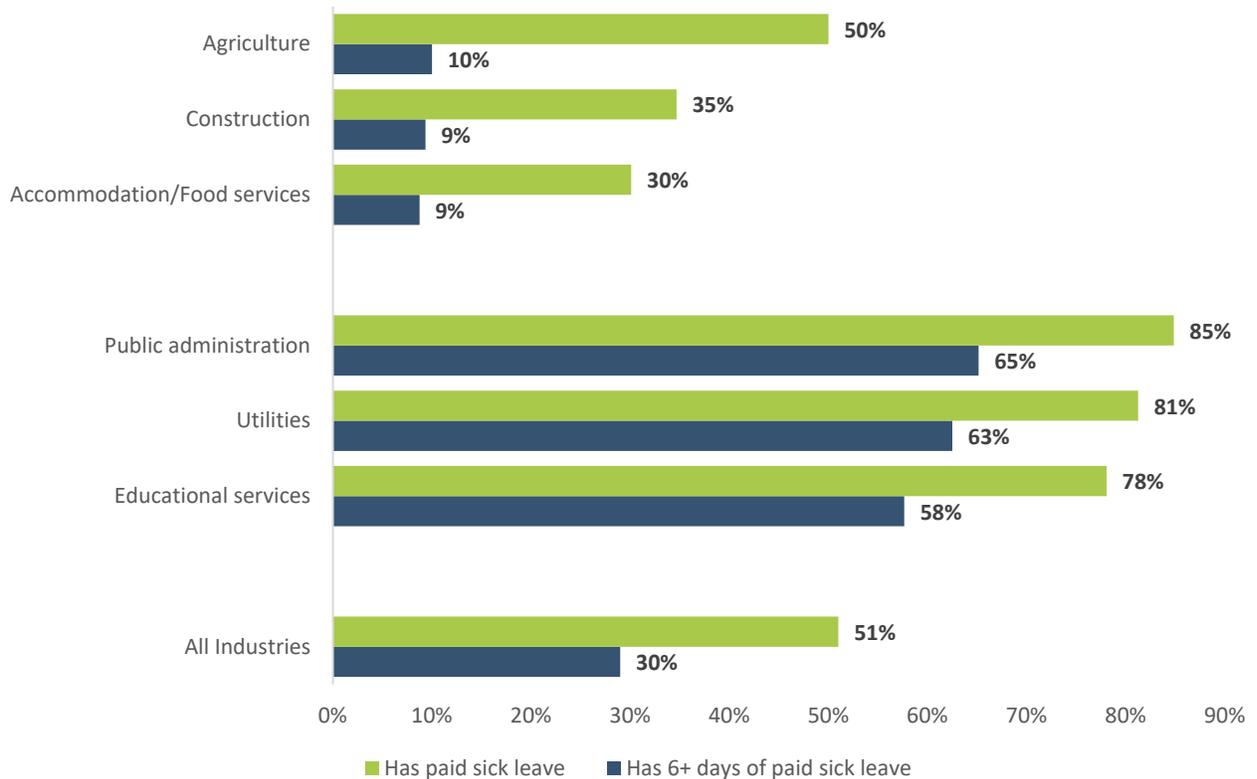
Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid $n=1,679$. Excludes those who were unsure as to their sick leave status.

Public sector and non-profit sector employees were significantly more likely than private sector employees to report having annual entitlement of 10 days or more of paid sick leave (45% and 24% compared to 7%, respectively). Similarly, unionized employees were significantly more likely to have annual entitlement of 10 days or more of paid sick leave (36% compared to 10%).

Unsurprisingly, the proportion of workers who reported having paid sick leave, as well as those who had six or more days of such leave, varied considerably by industry. For example, as highlighted in **Figure 5** below, employees who worked in public administration, utilities, and educational services reported much higher incidence of having paid sick leave and having six or more days of such leave. In contrast,

workers in accommodation and food services, construction, and agriculture reported much lower levels of paid sick leave, and six or more days of such leave.

Figure 5 – Paid Sick Leave Coverage, by Industry



Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*

Valid *ns* vary by industry. Excludes those who were unsure as to their sick leave status.

A more detailed breakdown of paid sick leave days, by industry, is provided below in **Table 6**.

Table 6 – Paid Sick Day Entitlements, by Industry

Industry	0 days	1-2 days	3-5 days	6-10 days	More than 10 days	Has paid sick leave, NOS*
Accommodation/Food services	67%	6%	13%	5%	4%	5%
Agriculture	49%	10%	28%	6%	6%	0%
Construction	68%	2%	16%	7%	2%	5%
Educational services	21%	1%	10%	19%	38%	11%
Finance & related fields	22%	4%	28%	23%	14%	9%
Health care & social assistance	37%	3%	9%	17%	25%	10%
Manufacturing	32%	3%	38%	18%	5%	3%
Natural resources	36%	0%	20%	24%	4%	16%
Professional/Technical services	41%	3%	20%	17%	14%	4%
Public administration	16%	0%	6%	17%	47%	14%
Retail & wholesale trade	57%	5%	19%	12%	3%	4%
Transportation & warehousing	60%	6%	18%	9%	3%	4%
Utilities	21%	0%	16%	17%	42%	4%
Other services	62%	4%	12%	8%	10%	4%

Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*

Valid n=1,791

*This column represents respondents who indicated they do have access to paid sick leave, but declined to respond to the question about how many days of paid leave, specifically, they are entitled to.

Finally, responses on paid sick day entitlements were examined by reported income level. Respondents with the lowest income levels were more likely to report having no paid sick day entitlements, while respondents with higher incomes were more likely to report having access to paid sick days, *and* to report having access to a greater number of sick days. **Table 7** below summarizes these breakdowns.

Table 7 – Paid Sick Day Entitlements, by Income Quintile

Income Quintile	0 days	1-2 days	3-5 days	6-10 days	More than 10 days	Has sick leave, NOS*
\$24,000 or less	82%	4%	7%	2%	2%	2%
Between \$24,001 and \$42,800	60%	4%	13%	10%	7%	6%
Between \$42,801 and \$62,200	37%	3%	21%	17%	16%	6%
Between \$62,201 and \$88,300	30%	4%	20%	20%	20%	5%
\$88,301 or more	31%	2%	17%	17%	26%	7%

Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*

Valid n=1,695

*This column represents respondents who indicated they do have access to paid sick leave, but declined to respond to the question about how many days of paid leave, specifically, they are entitled to.

Details of Paid Sick Leave

Among respondents with access to paid sick days, the large majority (86%) reported that they received full pay for every paid sick day; only 10% reported getting partial pay for all sick days, and 4% reported getting full pay for some sick days, and partial pay for other sick days.³

³ Given the very small number of individuals reporting full pay for some sick days and partial pay for others (n=37), we have not reported on the breakdown of this pay in this report.

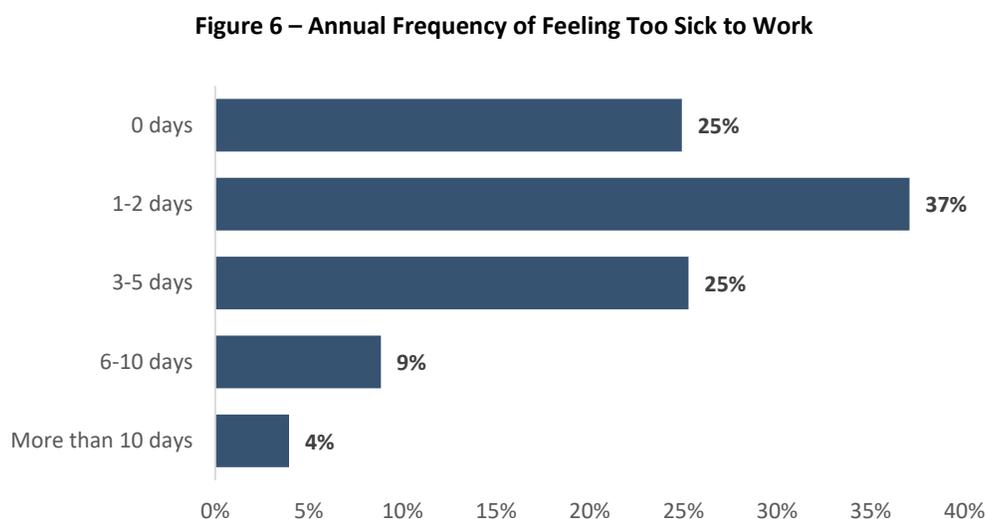
Of the survey respondents with entitlement to paid sick leave, more than one third (38%) reported being able to carry their unused sick days over to the next year. Of those who can carry over their sick days (n=322), more than three quarters (77%) reported being able to roll over all unused sick days, while the remainder could roll over only a portion. Public sector employees were significantly more likely than private sector employees to be able to roll over unused sick days (53% compared to 21%), and to be able to roll over all of their unused sick days rather than just a portion (80% compared to 59%). Unionized employees were more likely than non-unionized employees to be able to roll over unused sick days (60% compared to 14%), however there was no significant difference in the ability to roll over all, or just a portion, of days.

A minority of all respondents with entitlement to paid sick leave (22%) reported being able to have their unused paid sick days paid out at the end of their employment or work contract. Unionized employees were significantly more likely than non-union employees to have access to this benefit (32% compared to 9%).

Need for Paid Sick Leave in B.C.

Incidence of Illness Among Workers

The large majority of survey respondents (87%) reported that, in a typical year, they are too sick to work five or fewer days per year. A further 9% reported they felt too sick to work between six and ten days per year, and 4% felt too sick to work for more than ten days per year. **Figure 6** below illustrates responses to this question.



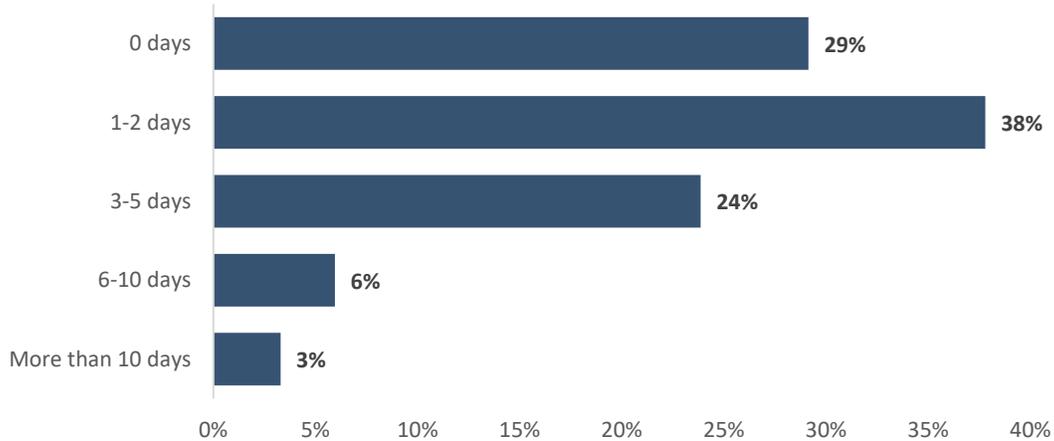
Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid n=1,911

There were significant differences by gender in terms of how frequently they felt too sick to work, with men being more likely than women to report that they never feel too sick to work in a typical year (27% compared to 23%).

Respondents were asked how many days they typically miss work in a year due to being sick (whether paid or unpaid). While the responses closely reflect the number of days that respondents felt too sick to

work, there is some discrepancy. For example, as shown in **Figure 6** above, 25% reported never feeling too sick to work, but 29% reported never missing work due to illness, suggesting that 4% of respondents *always* go into work when they feel sick.

Figure 7 – Annual Frequency of Missing Work Due to Illness

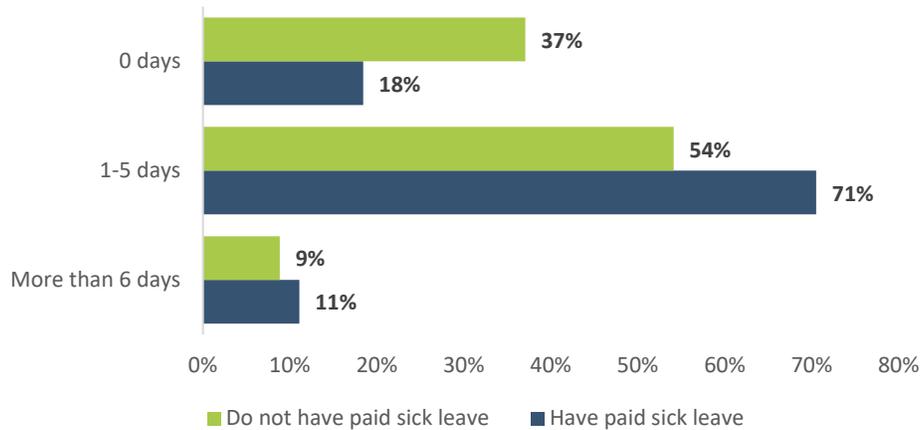


Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid n=1,906

There were similar gender discrepancies in reported rates of missing work due to illness. Men were significantly more likely than women to report missing no days of work due to illness (32% compared to 27%), while women were significantly more likely to report missing more than 10 days of work due to illness (4% compared to 2%).

Unsurprisingly, respondents who reported having no access to paid sick leave were significantly more likely than those with sick leave to report missing no days of work due to illness. Workers without sick leave were also significantly less likely to report missing between one and five days of work. Please refer to **Figure 8** below.

Figure 8 – Annual Frequency of Missing Work Due to Illness, by Access to Paid Sick Leave



Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*

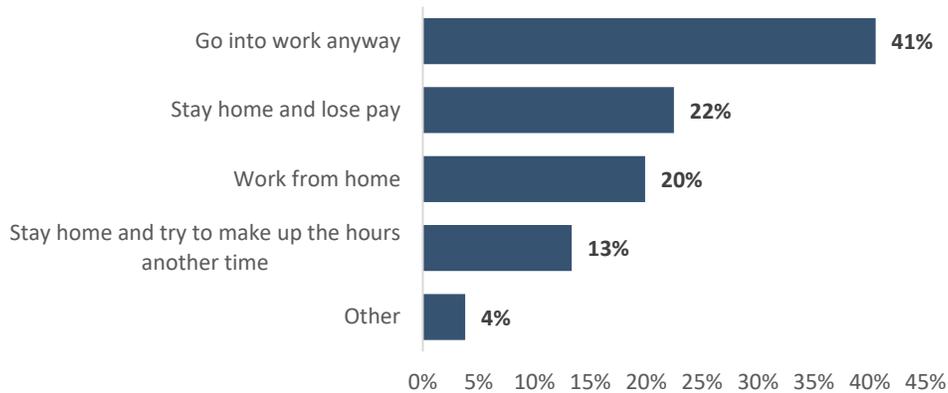
Valid $n=1,751$. Total n is lower than overall completions due to exclusion of “don’t know” responses to access to paid sick leave.

Among those respondents with paid sick leave, slightly more than one in five (21%) reported regularly using all their paid sick days in a year, while the remaining 79% reported that they did not typically use all the sick days they were entitled to each year. Private sector employees were significantly more likely to report using all their paid sick days each year (28% compared to 13% of public sector employees and 11% of non-profit employees), however this may be an artifact of having fewer sick days than these other groups; this should not be interpreted to mean that private sector employees take more sick days than those in other sectors.

Typical Behaviour when Sick

As noted in **Figure 7** above, approximately 71% of workers in B.C. miss at least one day of work per year due to illness, suggesting that workers are practicing good hygiene and staying home when sick at least some of the time. However, sick days (whether paid or unpaid) may not cover the entirety of their illness or injury recovery period, potentially creating a dilemma for workers (both with and without access to paid sick leave): either work while sick, or forego needed pay.

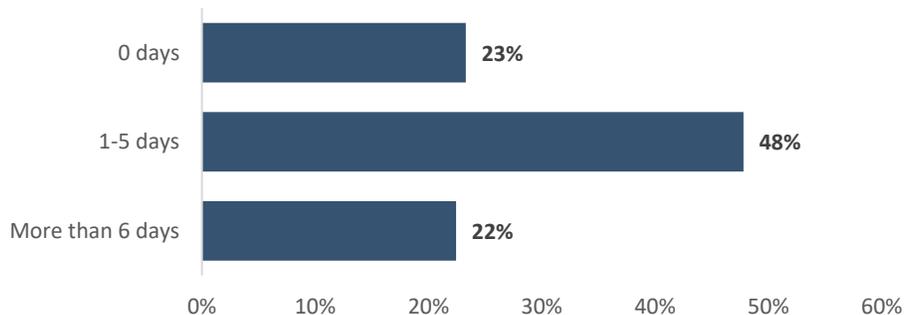
When people are feeling sick but do not have paid sick days available (i.e., they either have no paid sick leave, or have exhausted their available paid sick leave), the most common behaviour is to go into work anyways (41% reported doing this), followed by staying home from work and losing pay (23% reported doing this). **Figure 9** below illustrates responses to this question.

Figure 9 – Behaviour when Sick with No Paid Days Available


Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid n=1,905

Among respondents who indicated “other” options, the most common responses involved tapping into other sources of pay to cover their lost work time, such as banked hours, vacation time, or short-term disability pay.

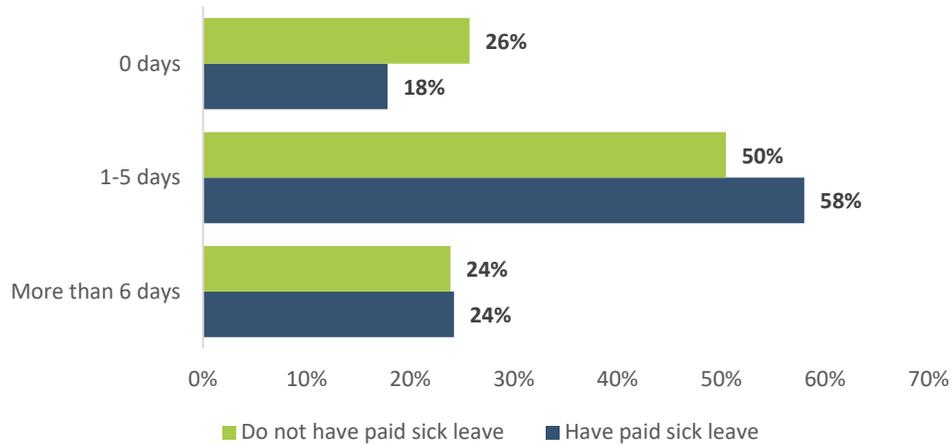
More than three-quarters of respondents to this survey reported working at least one day per year while sick, in a typical year. Further, approximately one-half of respondents worked more than three days per year while feeling sick (please refer to **Figure 10** below).

Figure 10 – Frequency of Working While Sick


Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid n=1,906

Gender differences also existed in working while sick. Men were significantly more likely to report never working while sick in a typical year (26% compared to 21%), while women were significantly more likely to report working while sick ten or more days per year (13% compared to 9%).

Reflective of the discrepancies in missing work due to illness, respondents with access to paid sick leave were significantly less likely to report never working while sick in a typical year, compared to those without paid sick leave. Please see **Figure 11** below.

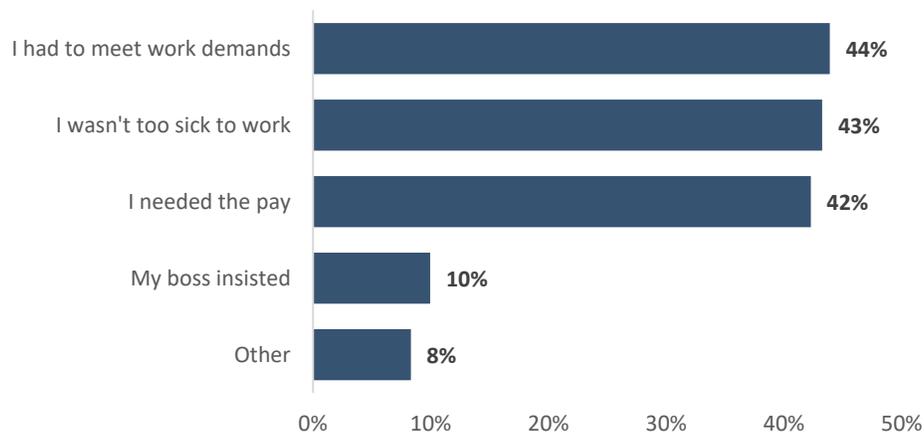
Figure 11 – Frequency of Working While Sick, by Access to Paid Sick Leave


Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid n=1,906

More than two-thirds of all survey respondents (71%) reported that they had ever returned to work before being fully recovered from an illness. Interestingly, respondents *without* paid sick leave were significantly less likely to have ever done this (70% compared to 75%, respectively). This may reflect differing workplace cultures regarding how “recovered” is considered, or may be a result of workers without paid sick leave being less likely to take time off for illness in the first place.

Reasons People Work when Sick

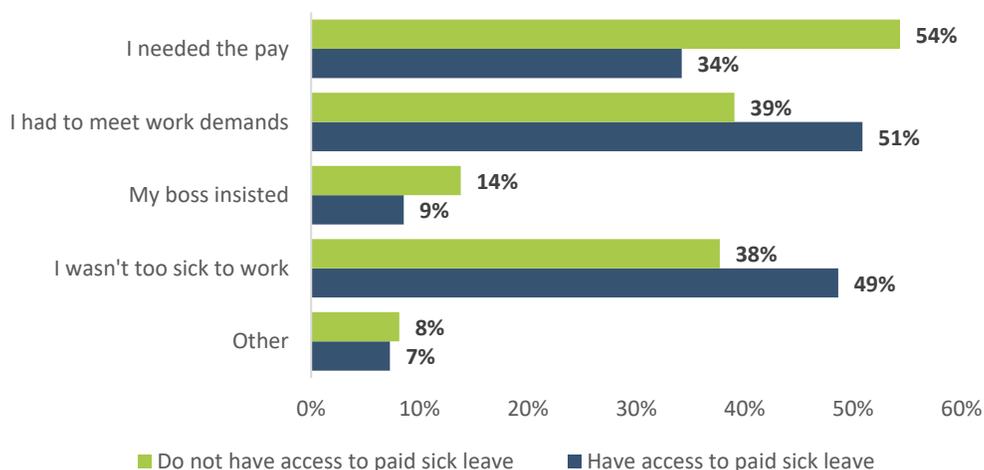
Respondents reported a variety of reasons for working even while sick, with multiple pressures often playing a role in their decision to work while sick. Slightly less than one-half of all respondents endorsed three main reasons for working while sick: meeting work demands (44%), not being too sick to work (43%), and needing the pay (42%).

Figure 12 – Reasons for Working While Sick


Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
Valid n=1,904

Respondents who reported having access to paid sick leave were significantly more likely to be motivated by work demands, and feeling like they weren't too sick to work, than respondents without sick pay. In contrast, respondents without access to paid sick leave were significantly more likely to report working because they needed the pay.

Figure 12 – Reasons for Working While Sick, by Access to Sick Leave



Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*
 Valid $n=1,748$. Excludes those who were unsure as to their sick leave status.
 Note totals add to more than 100% due to multiple response.

Among respondents who reported “other” reasons for working while sick, common themes identified in open-ended comments included:

- Workplace social or cultural expectations and pressures;
- Being responsible for securing one’s own shift coverage, which can be challenging or impossible;
- Fearing reprisals at work for taking a sick day, whether reprisals were formal or informal; and
- Personal reasons, such as being bored or wanting to work.

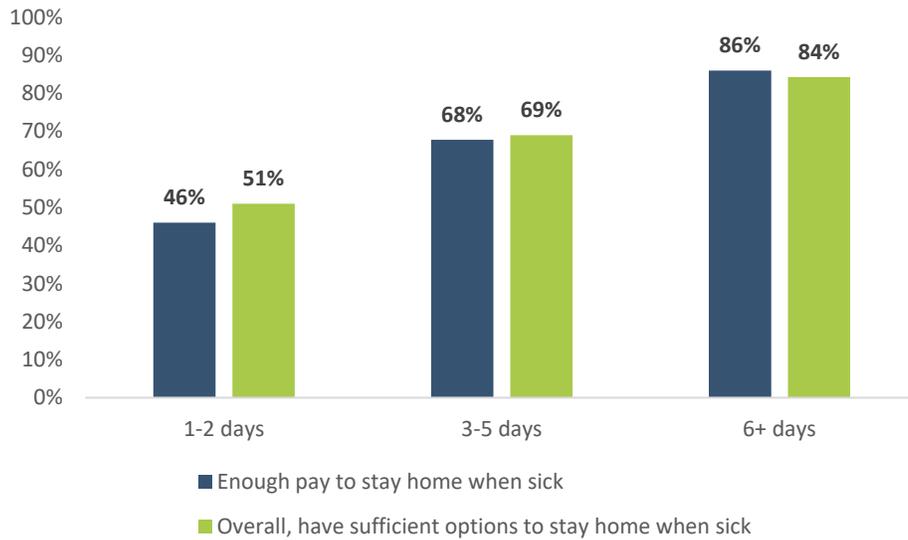
Options for Staying Home when Sick

Overall, less than one-half of respondents (40%) reported having the option to work from home when sick at least some of the time. Unsurprisingly, those without access to paid sick leave were significantly less likely to be able to work from home when sick (69% said this was not an option for them, compared to 49% of workers with paid sick leave).

Survey respondents who reported having access to paid sick leave were asked how they feel about the coverage their policies currently offer. More than three-quarters of respondents (78%) reported feeling that their sick leave policy offers them enough pay to stay home when sick, and a similar proportion (77%) felt that overall their workplace offered them enough options to choose to stay home when sick.

There were significant differences by length of paid sick leave on both of these issues, with a clear linear relationship between length of leave and overall satisfaction with leave. Please refer to **Figure 13** below for an illustration.

Figure 13 – Satisfaction with Paid Sick Leave Coverage, by Length of Paid Sick Leave



Source: *Paid Sick Leave in B.C. Employee Panel Survey, 2021*

Valid $n=773$ for the 'enough pay' item; $n=780$ for the 'sufficient options' item

Demands for Improvement to Sick Leave in B.C.

In total, 932 respondents (45%) provided comment on how they believed sick leave could be improved. Of these 932, 329 (35%) reported having no suggestions for improving their sick leave program and were happy with what they had available to them; a further 40 comments were coded as off-topic or unintelligible, leaving 563 valid comments that were coded thematically.

Of these valid comments, the following suggestions were made for improving sick leave:

- More paid sick days (39%);
- Increase the pay provided on sick days (15%);
- Offer an option to carry over unused sick days to the next year (13%);
- Offer an option to pay out unused sick days at the end of each year (11%);
- Address or disallow employer reprisals for taking sick days (10%);
- Increase work from home opportunities (7%);
- Provide better communication and education about employees' entitlements to sick days (5%);
- Add family sick days, or increase sick days to account for taking care of family members (4%);
- Make employers responsible for ensuring shifts are covered, rather than leaving it to employees to find a substitute (4%);
- Reduce the burden of doctor's notes (4%);
- Include mental health days in paid sick leave, or create dedicated mental health days (3%);
- Sick leave should be supported by EI or some other insurance scheme (2%);
- Workplaces should create and promote a culture of staying home when sick (2%);
- Provincial legislation mandating a minimum number of paid sick days (1%);
- Sick days should be an annual entitlement, rather than earned over the course of a year's employment (1%);
- Ensure paid sick leave is available to more employees such as part-time, casual, seasonal staff (1%);
- Don't pay out unused sick days annually, as it creates an incentive to come in to work while sick (1%).⁴

⁴ Comments could be coded with up to three themes, therefore percentages may add up to more than 100%.