

0. *Pre-read for context.*

1. *Close read the text for understanding.*

2. *Perform one of the five analytical reading tasks.*

3. *Write a one-page reflection, connecting this article to your own experiences, reading, or observations.*

### **'If We Work Sick, Then You Get Sick'**

by The Editorial Board, *The New York Times*, March 11, 2020

Walmart, the nation's largest private employer, set a standard for the rest of the private sector on Tuesday by announcing that, in addition to its existing paid sick leave policy, it would provide up to two weeks of paid leave for employees who fall ill or are quarantined because of a confirmed exposure to the coronavirus.

It's now incumbent upon other American employers to match that example.

Companies that do not provide paid sick leave to all employees, particularly those in the retail and restaurant industries, are endangering their workers and customers.

Studies show that paying for sick employees to stay home significantly reduces the spread of the seasonal flu. There's every reason to think it would help to check the spread of the new coronavirus, too.

But many of the nation's big restaurant chains, in particular, do not provide paid sick leave. Nationwide, only 45 percent of workers in the hotel and food service industries get paid sick days, compared with 97 percent in the financial industry, according to the latest federal data. The list of restaurants that don't pay sick workers to stay home is a roll call of familiar brands, including Burger King, Chick-fil-A, Jack in the Box, Wendy's and Panera.

One consequence: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2014 that "one in five food service workers have reported working at least once in the previous year while sick with vomiting or diarrhea."

Other developed nations, and a number of American states and cities, already mandate some form of paid sick leave, and some congressional Democrats have seized the coronavirus moment to push for a change in federal law. Such a change is long overdue, and would be welcome news.

But it is not sufficient, by itself, to meet the demands of the moment.

Public health officials recommend that people exposed to the coronavirus remain in isolation for 14 days. Even companies that provide sick leave are rarely that generous. Accordingly, the proposed legislation would also require up to 14 days of paid sick leave during public health emergencies.

One flaw in the proposal is that it would require employers to foot the bill, even as many companies are facing a drop in revenue. The government should absorb the cost of the emergency sick leave provisions by giving companies a tax credit.

Americans needn't wait on Washington — particularly because any change in federal law depends on President Trump's willingness to act in the public interest.

People looking for a place to eat can protect their own health, and encourage restaurant chains to do the right thing, by patronizing places that offer paid sick leave.

Darden Restaurants, which owns chains including Olive Garden and Longhorn Steakhouse, has long opposed paid sick leave for its roughly 170,000 hourly workers. Indeed, the company has campaigned against sick leave laws. But on Monday, following publication of an exposé by the journalist Judd Legum, Darden said it was offering sick leave effective immediately. (The company, however, has not committed to pay workers in quarantine.)

McDonald's confirmed in an email to The Times Tuesday that it will pay for up to 14 days in quarantine — although the change does not apply to workers at the roughly 80 percent of McDonald's owned by franchisees, and the company still does not guarantee paid sick leave to all workers.

Other major restaurant chains that do not offer sick leave to all employees did not respond to emails on Tuesday asking whether they would change their policies.

One idea that might help: In 2016, a Colorado state senator proposed unsuccessfully that restaurants that do not provide paid sick leave be required to post a notice on the front door.

Eleven states, beginning with Connecticut in 2012, already have passed laws requiring large employers to offer paid sick leave. The list now includes New York and California, as well as a number of large cities, including Washington, D.C. But companies can sidestep those regulations by categorizing workers as contractors, and laws require enforcement.

Last month, the Service Employees International Union released a report alleging Chipotle stores in New York routinely violated the city's sick leave laws. It quoted workers who said they had been told to work while sick. The company, which offers paid sick leave at all of its locations even in jurisdictions that do not require the benefit, has said that it is committed to following the law and that employees who are sick should stay home.

The city has taken some actions against Chipotle, including suing the company last year for violating worker protections at five locations in Brooklyn. Last month, New York fined Chipotle for firing a worker who took three sick days. But the union, which has led a series of walkouts at New York Chipotle restaurants, said workers need better protection.

"If we work sick, then you get sick," workers chanted during a recent protest.

They're right — and companies have a duty to make sure that doesn't happen.