



# REPRODUCTIVE EQUITY NOW

## Benefits of Paid Parental Leave

- The US is the only one of the thirty-five Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and one of only six countries in the world without a national paid parental leave policy.<sup>1</sup>
- The U.S. is also one of the few high-income countries without a national family caregiving or medical leave policy.<sup>2</sup>
- Mothers<sup>3</sup> fare better when they have paid time off after giving birth, including a 51% decrease in the risk of rehospitalization.<sup>4</sup>
- Women who aren't able to take as much time off—especially those who return to work in under 2 months—face more depressive symptoms and more marital and self-esteem problems.<sup>5</sup>
- Underprivileged families may benefit most from parental leave policies, starting with better birth outcomes, including fewer early-term births, possibly owing to decreased stress during pregnancy.<sup>6</sup>
  - But these families are often ineligible for such benefits because of the limits of the FMLA and inconsistency in state and employer policies.<sup>7</sup>
  - People who get paid leave are much more likely to be affluent, well educated, and White.<sup>8</sup>
  - U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicate that about 47% of White parents, 41% of Black parents, and just 23% of Hispanic parents have access to paid leave.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Paid Family Leave Across OECD Countries](#), Bipartisan Policy Center, Bipartisanpolicy.org (2022).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Gender inclusivity is important to equity and the reproductive justice movement. We have endeavored to use gender inclusive language throughout the toolkit. Unfortunately, most of the available data collected deals primarily with pregnant women.

<sup>4</sup> [Paid Maternity Leave in the United States: Associations with Maternal and Infant Health](#), Jou J, Kozhimannil KB, Abraham JM, Blewett LA, McGovern PM, *Maternal Child Health J.* 2018.

<sup>5</sup> [The Effect of Paid Family Leave on Infant and Parental Health in the United States](#), Bullinger L. R. (2019), *Journal of health economics*, 66, 101–116.

<sup>6</sup> [The effects of paid maternity leave: Evidence from Temporary Disability Insurance](#), Stearns, Jenna, 2015. *Journal of Health Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 43(C), pages 85-102.

<sup>7</sup> [Racial and ethnic disparities in access to and use of paid family and medical leave: evidence from four nationally representative datasets](#), *Monthly Labor Review*: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*



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- After California passed its paid family leave law, poverty risk among mothers of infants decreased by more than 10%.<sup>10</sup>
- After Norway replaced its 12-week unpaid leave policy with 16 weeks of paid leave, many facets of new mothers' health improved, including blood pressure, pain levels, and exercise and smoking behaviors.<sup>11</sup>
- Paid leave is also associated with greater relationship stability and may even help reduce intimate partner violence.<sup>12</sup>
- When men take leave, their partners also benefit. Following a Swedish policy reform that increased fathers' ability to stay home, mothers had fewer physical health complications and were less likely to take prescription medications for anxiety.<sup>13</sup>
- Paid leave is even harder for fathers to obtain, which particularly harms same-sex male couples, who receive less leave than heterosexual or same-sex female couples in many countries.<sup>14</sup>
- Paid leave is associated with lower infant-mortality rates and higher rates of vaccination, especially for families below the poverty line.<sup>15</sup>
- Parents' paid leave is associated with better language skills in toddlers and fewer infant behavioral problems for mothers with less education.<sup>16</sup>
- Studies on leaves earmarked specifically for fathers in European countries (colloquially referred to as "daddy months" or "daddy quotas") suggest that there is no detrimental impact of such policies on fathers' future earnings or employment.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [Does Paid Family Leave Improve Household Economic Security Following a Birth? Evidence from California](#) | Social Service Review: Vol 93, No 2, Social Service Review (2013), (last visited Aug 15, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> [The Impact of Paid Maternity Leave on Maternal Health](#), Bütikofer, A., et al., American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2021

<sup>12</sup> [If I \[Take\] Leave, Will You Stay? Paternity Leave and Relationship Stability](#), Petts, R. J., et al., Journal of Social Policy, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2020; [Preventing intimate partner violence through paid parental leave policies](#), Schappell D'Inverno, A., et al., Preventive Medicine, Vol. 114, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> [Father's Workplace Flexibility and Maternal Health](#), Persson, P., & Rossin-Slater, M., NBER Working Paper No. 25902, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> [Comparing the availability of paid parental leave for same-sex and different-sex couples in 34 OECD countries](#), Wong, E., et al., Journal of Social Policy, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> [Paid family leave and children health outcomes in OECD countries](#), Khan, M. S., Child and Youth Services Review, Vol. 116, 2020; [The impact of paid family leave on the timely vaccination of infants](#), Choudhury, A. R., & Polachek, S. W., Vaccine, Vol. 39, No. 21, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> [Paid maternal leave is associated with better language and socioemotional outcomes during toddlerhood](#), Kozak, K., et al., Infancy, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> [Paid Family Leave Policies And Population Health](#) | Health Affairs Brief, Healthaffairs.org (2022), (last visited Aug 9, 2022).