

## FACT SHEET:

# Paid Parental Leave and Maternal and Child Health

### What is parental leave?

Parental leave is time off from work available to either parent to bond with and care for a newborn, newly-adopted child or newly-placed foster child. Parental leave allows parents time to care for their children, giving them the best chance at a healthy start in life. However, without job-protected paid leave, many parents face an impossible choice between their child's health and their income or jobs.

The United States remains the sole rich or middle-income nation not to guarantee paid parental leave by law.<sup>i</sup> The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), does offer 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for newborn children or other sick family members. But, because workers must be employed by a company with 50 or more employees for a year, working an average of 24 hours per week or more, much of the workforce is not covered by the law. As a result, more than 2 out of every 5 employees have no federal legal right to return to their job if they take unpaid leave—of any length—to care for a newborn.<sup>ii</sup> In addition, every year, more than 2.5 million employees who are eligible for FMLA don't take the leave because they can't afford the loss of pay.<sup>iii</sup>

Three states now have paid family leave public insurance programs (California, New Jersey and Rhode Island), and some employers are providing paid leave benefits to boost recruitment and retention, but there are many gaps.<sup>iv</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 13% of private sector workers were allowed some paid family leave in 2014—mostly higher-paid professionals, managers and executives.<sup>v</sup>

### Research indicates that when parents have more time at home with their children, their families are healthier.

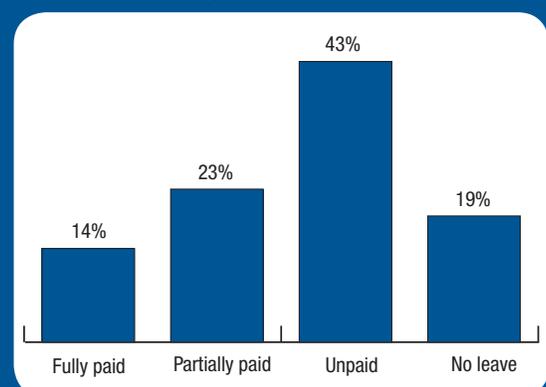
- Working mothers who receive job-protected paid leave are more likely to take at least the minimum six to eight weeks of leave recommended by physicians.<sup>vi</sup>
- Newborns whose mothers take longer leaves are more likely to be taken to the pediatrician for regular check-ups and immunizations and more likely to be breastfed.<sup>vii</sup>
- Fathers who take longer leaves after the birth of a child are more likely to be involved in the direct care of their children nine months later.<sup>viii</sup>
- Paid parental leave is associated with significantly better infant health, including fewer infant deaths.<sup>ix</sup>

### Paid parental leave in Oregon

Similar to the FMLA, the Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA) allows eligible employees up to twelve weeks of job-protected parental leave in a leave year, typically running concurrently with any leave available to the employee under FMLA.<sup>x</sup> As with FMLA, many employers are not OFLA-covered, many employees are not OFLA-eligible, and even eligible employees with a new child may be unable to afford to take unpaid leave.<sup>xi</sup>

Few new moms in Oregon receive fully-paid leave and access to paid leave is not available equally across populations. Among Oregon women who worked during the last three months of pregnancy, 14.3% reported having been offered fully-paid leave, 23.4% partially-paid and 42.9% unpaid; 19.3% were offered no leave (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Type of maternity leave, among women who worked during the last three months of their pregnancy, Oregon, 2010 - 2011**



Source: Oregon PRAMS-2

**Figure 2. Percent of women without paid maternity leave, among those who worked in the last three months of their pregnancy, Oregon, 2010 - 2011**

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| All women                                   | 62.3% |
| ≤ 185% FPL                                  | 79.7% |
| > 185% FPL                                  | 59.4% |
| White, Non-Hispanic                         | 64.3% |
| Black, Non-Hispanic                         | 56.5% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic        | 53.8% |
| American Indian/Alaska Native, Non-Hispanic | 71.9% |
| Hispanic                                    | 74.5% |
| ≤ 25 years old                              | 67.1% |
| 26 to 34 years old                          | 64.7% |
| ≥ 35 years old                              | 63.3% |
| High school or less                         | 72.5% |
| Some college                                | 69.5% |
| Undergraduate degree or higher              | 58.6% |
| Married                                     | 64.1% |
| Not married                                 | 67.6% |
| Urban                                       | 64.1% |
| Rural                                       | 68.4% |

Source: Oregon PRAMS-2

**For more information:**

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**Disparities in paid parental leave in Oregon**

Oregon data also reveal disparities in who has access to paid leave, with those most likely to need the benefit often being the least likely to have access to it. The inequity in access to paid leave contributes to health inequities beginning early in life. Mothers with lower incomes, American Indian/Alaskan Native and Hispanic mothers, younger mothers and mothers without a college degree were less likely to have access to paid maternity leave (see Figure 2).

**Paid leave policies would benefit Oregon families**

A comprehensive parental leave law that allows all Oregon workers access to paid parental leave would contribute to better health and decreased health disparities for Oregon children. Many Oregon parents cannot afford to spend time away from their jobs and must return to work soon after a new baby joins their family. Paid parental leave contributes to better child health and strengthens parental involvement by helping mothers and fathers reduce the tensions between their work and family responsibilities.

<sup>i</sup> Maternity and paternity at work Law and practice across the world, International Labor Organization ILO’s 2014 report, [“Maternity and paternity at work”](#)

<sup>ii</sup> The Raising of America, The Family Leave Shuffle <http://www.raisingofamerica.org/family-leave>

<sup>iii</sup> June 2014, Center for Economic and Policy Research Documenting the Need for a National Paid Family and Medical Leave Program: Evidence from the 2012 FMLA Survey <http://cepr.net/documents/fmla-paid-leave-2014-06.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> US Department of Labor, The Cost of Doing Nothing Report <https://www.dol.gov/featured/paidleave/cost-of-doing-nothing-report.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> The Raising of America, The Family Leave Shuffle <http://www.raisingofamerica.org/family-leave>

<sup>vi</sup> Gomby, D., & Pei, D. (2009). Newborn Family Leave: Effects on Children, Parents, and Business. David and Lucile Packard Foundation Publication. Retrieved from <http://paidfamilyleave.org/pdf/NebwornFamilyLeave.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Berger, L., Hill, J., & Waldfogel, J. (2005). Maternity Leave, Early Maternal Employment and Child Health and Development in the US. The Economic Journal, 115 (501), F44

<sup>viii</sup> Nepomnyaschy, L., & Waldfogel, J. (2007). Paternity Leave and Fathers’ Involvement with their Young Children. Community, Work, and Family, 10 (4)

<sup>ix</sup> Ruhm, Christopher J. 2000. Parental Leave and Child Health. Journal of Health Economics 19 (6): 931-960. Tanaka, S. 2005. Parental Leave and Child Health Across OECD Countries. Economic Journal 115(501): 7-28.

<sup>x</sup> Oregon Administrative Rule 839-009-0200 [http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/pages/rules/oars\\_800/oar\\_839/839\\_009.html](http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/pages/rules/oars_800/oar_839/839_009.html)

<sup>xi</sup> The Oregon Civil Rights Newsletter, published by the Civil Rights Section of the Oregon State Bar. December 2016 <https://www.barran.com/assets/pdf/2017/Civil%20Rights%20News%20Dec%202016.pdf>