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## Senators debate requiring sick leave for flu

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By [Maggie Fox](#), Health and Science Editor

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - When Desiree Rosado's daughter got the flu last month, she took a week off without pay; just an hour after finally returning to work Rosado had to leave again to take her feverish son home.

A bill proposed by Democratic Senator Chris Dodd would require U.S. employers to provide paid sick leave, helping workers like Rosado and hopefully slowing the spread of swine flu.

"When I don't get paid, it wreaks havoc on our family budget," Rosado, an education assistant from Groton, Connecticut, told a Senate subcommittee hearing on Tuesday. "Sometimes we end up having to borrow from our rent money that we set aside."

Health officials have been urging anyone with flu-like symptoms such as cough and fever to stay home to avoid spreading it.

"Coming down with H1N1 means you have to make a choice either go into work sick and risk infecting co-workers, or stay at home and risk of course losing a day's pay," Dodd told a hearing of a health and labor subcommittee he chairs.

Democratic Representative Rosa DeLauro, invited to speak at the hearing, said 57 million Americans do not get paid leave, or even sometimes unpaid leave, to stay home sick or to care for sick relatives.

Dodd said three-quarters of them work in food and service industries and endanger not only co-workers, but the public.

"Food service is not an industry where we want workers showing up with contagious viral infections," DeLauro added.

DeLauro in the House and Dodd in the Senate want to require that employers provide seven paid sick days for workers who have flu-like symptoms or whose children have them.

Republican Senator Mike Enzi said the proposal would hurt small businesses at a time when they need help creating new jobs, and might even end up costing jobs when the unemployment rate is 10.2 percent. "This is not the time to compound problems," Enzi said.

The provision would also let workers take off with pay to care for a child whose school or child care facility has been closed because of flu. It would expire after two years.

"Our system forces too many sick workers to go to work and too many parents to send sick children to school and daycare," said Seth Harris of the U.S. Department of Labor.

Dr Anne Schuchat of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention noted that pandemic H1N1 was hitting children and young working-age adults far harder than regular seasonal flu does.

The H1N1 virus has infected millions globally, with more than 6,000 documented deaths, according to the World Health Organization. The CDC estimates that more than 5 million Americans have been infected.

(Editing by [Eric Beech](#))

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