

Some eateries serving up the flu with lunch

► More than half of food industry workers don't have paid sick leave, report finds ► That means you may be served by someone who is ill, says advocate ► Some pushing bill that gives all New Yorkers paid sick days

Would you like a side of germs with that burger?

A new study published today by the Community Service Society, an advocacy group that fights against economic disparity, reveals a startling statistic: More than half the people who prepare, handle or serve food in New York City do not have any paid sick leave. And that means your waiter could make you sick.

Nancy Rankin, the head researcher of the study, warned that when restaurant workers are denied paid sick leave, they are forced to work with runny noses, nasty coughs and high fevers.

"They're spreading germs to all the people eating in the restaurant," said Rankin. "It's hard to swallow."

Rankin said many restaurant workers fear they will be fired if they miss a shift, so they work while they're ill, or even contagious.

Barbara Sibley, who owns the East Village Mexican restaurant La Palapa, said she often has to turn away her employees who come in sick.

"We have to send them home. They need to take care of themselves," she said.

Sibley, 49, is one of the few restaurant owners in the city who offers her 30 employees

Waiting for health care

A career waitress who wished to remain anonymous told Metro she goes to the doctor so rarely, her appendix burst while she was serving customers once. "I try to go to doctors once a year, in Mexico, where I can afford it," she said. Her dentist, dermatologist and physician are all across the border in a town where she vacations annually. "In the restaurant business, you just try not to get sick," she said.

health care and paid sick leave.

"I just think it should be a right," Sibley said. "People get sick and they should be able to get well."

And it's not just restaurant workers who are affected by the lack of paid sick leave. The survey estimated that nearly 1.6 million New Yorkers don't have any paid sick days. Upper West Side Councilwoman Gale Brewer is pushing forward legislation that would require all New York City businesses to offer their employees paid sick time.

Convincing the City Council

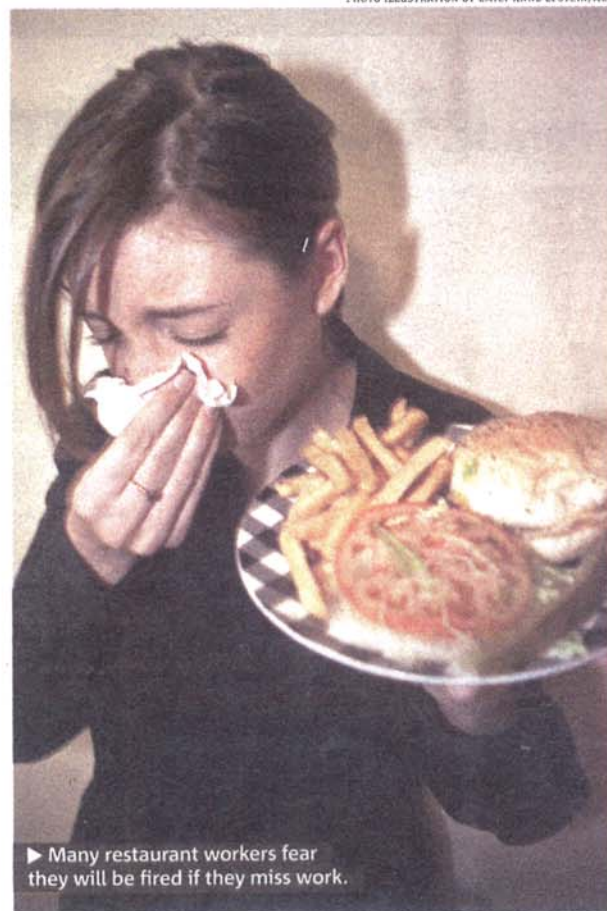
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn shot down Councilwoman Gale Brewer's paid sick time legislation when it was first proposed in 2010 because of the presumed burden it would place on small-business owners.

"In the economic environment we are in, small businesses are hanging on by a thread," said Quinn. "Although this goal is laudable, it's not one I can support because (it will) ... cost us small businesses and their future in these tough economic times."

But Brewer said she has revised the bill to be more small-business friendly, exempting businesses with fewer than five employees and adding a one-year grace period for new businesses.

"I understand her concerns, but I believe in this case, the issue of public health outweighs them," said Brewer.

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► Many restaurant workers fear they will be fired if they miss work.

"Most diners would be shocked that restaurants can't give their workers paid sick days."

NANCY RANKIN, OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY

"I know someone who burnt their hand and they got fired while they were healing."

BARBARA SIBLEY, OWNER OF LA PALAPA IN THE EAST VILLAGE

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