

## Doctor's note for all sick calls? Here are 5 reasons I wouldn't.

By [Robin E. Shea](#) on February 18, 2011

One common employer practice that I have never liked is requiring employees who call in sick to bring in a doctor's note. I'm not talking about extended or recurring absences that would be covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act, or time off that would be covered under a short-term or long-term disability policy, or requests for reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act.



I'm talking about garden-variety, short-term absences for things like colds, sore throats, tummy bugs, or the flu.

And I am feeling so validated right now because I see that [Cynical Girl](#) and most of her commenters (presumably Human Resources people) agree with me.

Here are five reasons why I think it's not a good idea:

**1-It screams to the employee "I don't trust you."** Sure, there are some employees you don't trust, but why treat them all like abusers? Even employees who use a lot of sick time or paid time off may have legitimate reasons -- they may have genuine chronic health problems, or they may have young kids who get sick (my sons are grown now, but I certainly remember the days when our family was a veritable tag team of illness), or they may have been incredibly unlucky, or they may be expectant mothers with morning sickness.

**2-It is a hassle to the employee and may actually retard recovery.** I may legitimately have a miserable cold or sore throat, and I may get over it in 24 hours if I can sleep it off. But if I have to waste half of my sick day driving my sorry body over to the nearest walk-in clinic, waiting 2-3 hours with other sick, contagious people, to see a doctor who prescribes (surprise!) bed rest, and driving my sorry body back home, I may not get over it quite so quickly.

**3-It is a hassle to our poor, overburdened health care providers.** It's bad enough that these poor souls have to deal with the FMLA and HIPAA privacy, and now try to make some sense out of the "[safe harbor](#)" language under the [Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act](#). Do we really need to add to their grief by requiring them to see patients who are sick with illnesses that nothing can be done about anyway?

**4-It is a hassle to HR and supervisors.** Even though having employees out sick is a hassle, it is also an administrative hassle to parse every single request for a sick day.

**5-It encourages sick, infectious people to come to work and make everyone else sick.** 'Nuff said.

On the other hand, employers may want to request doctor's notes when there is good reason to be suspicious of a request for sick time. For example, if your employee is a teacher in the Madison, Wisconsin, public school system, you might want to ask for a doctor's note.

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