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Centers for Disease Control

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RFK's CDC cut back on parasite monitoring. Then an outbreak spiraled

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AI Overview

A surge of cyclosporiasis cases across the United States has been linked to reduced CDC parasite monitoring resources to manage the outbreak.

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How did Trump-era cuts affect CDC's parasite tracking? →

Why is Michigan the cyclosporiasis hotspot? →

What role did CDC funding cuts play in outbreak? →

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UPDATE: *This story has been updated to include new cyclosporiasis case numbers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, published Tuesday.*

An outbreak of an "explosive" diarrhea-causing parasite is picking up steam across the United States as thousands of residents have reported falling ill.

Cyclosporiasis, or the disease caused by the parasite cyclospora, has been identified in more than 1,600 confirmed cases, with 5,100 others being investigated,

according to updated data from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) on July 13. More than 100 people have been hospitalized and cases have been confirmed in 34 states.

The agency, headquartered and operated out of Atlanta, noted they are aware of other cases and are working with state health agencies for [updated case numbers](#).

The CDC has been unable to [confirm a specific source](#) of the parasitic infection, which is known to be found on fresh produce and in water in tropical regions. Cyclosporiasis cases tend to spike in summer months, the CDC says, or between May and August.

But this time, health officials inside the agency and across the country are tackling the outbreak with fewer staff and resources.

What changed inside the CDC?

Trump Administration cuts back parasite monitoring

Cyclospora was one of multiple parasites that were removed from a mandatory reporting list last summer under the Trump Administration.

Historically, the CDC's Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, or FoodNet, tracked cases of food poisoning, referring to a number of pathogens that can cause gastrointestinal and other symptoms.

The program began in the late '90s and worked with state health departments, the Food and Drug Administration and the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service to conduct testing of food products across the country, hopefully catching parasites before they become larger outbreaks.

Last year, however, the program was significantly cut back as part of Secretary Robert F. Kennedy's changes to the agency. Required monitoring was cut down from [eight pathogens to just two](#), and the other six pathogens were made optional,

including cyclospora. Salmonella and STEC remain the only required pathogens for monitoring.

"Narrowing FoodNet's reporting requirements is, in part, because the surveillance landscape has changed since the collaboration began in 1995," a note on the CDC's website reads. "Changes to the reporting requirements and associated activities allow FoodNet to prioritize core activities, while maintaining both the infrastructure and quality FoodNet represents."

FoodNet works closely with laboratories in Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee and select counties in California and New York.

Michigan is not on the list, but is currently experiencing the highest case numbers of cyclosporiasis.

The monitoring will not prevent an infection from taking place, but it can catch an outbreak in the early days, identifying a cause and preventing many people from ever getting sick.

Linda Yancey, an infectious disease specialist at Memorial Hermann Health System in Texas, told TIME Magazine that outbreaks like this may become more common as health officials are forced to work with reduced staff and limited funding.

"Unfortunately with so many budget cuts, every federal agency is hurting for personnel and resources," Yancey told the outlet. "We could be at a greater risk of foodborne infections because the FDA is so understaffed and underfunded right now."

How many employees were cut from CDC in Atlanta?

In Atlanta, health officials saw the changes directly through both staffing and funding cuts.

One-quarter of the CDC's workforce had been let go by the end of 2025, according to reporting from KFF Health News, including hundreds of staff in Atlanta.

Scientists were cut from areas such as injury prevention, health statistics and those in congressional relations. Positions from other departments across the agency were also eliminated.

It's unclear what staffing changes may have been made within the FoodNet program.

American public health and the city of Atlanta have been intrinsically tied to one another for decades, as both the home of the CDC as well as other public health groups like the Carter Center, the American Cancer Society and the Task Force for Global Health. It also hosts medical schools at Emory and Morehouse, both with public health programs.

Then known as the Communicable Disease Center, the now-CDC was founded in 1946 to help military members at Southern bases stay safe from malaria, later growing to include other communicable diseases and health-related issues like smoking and bioterror.

Many public health officials from around the world moved to Atlanta to work within these agencies, and made their home in the city for decades before their positions were eliminated last year.

Some former CDC employees have transitioned to work in these other public health sectors, according to the New York Times, but it's unclear if they would ever bring their wealth of knowledge back to the government agency should a new administration attempt to rebuild federal programs.

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