

Cyclospora in 2026:

What Consumers Need to Know and What Must Change

Thousands of people across the United States have been sickened by cyclosporiasis, a gastrointestinal illness caused by a microscopic parasite. Weeks into the surge, investigators still have not identified a source. Consumer Reports (CR) experts explain what is happening, why answers are taking so long, and what must change to better protect consumers.

Is this a single, widespread, national outbreak?

- It's been a common misconception that there is a single, nationwide outbreak. There is no evidence yet to confirm that. The FDA is currently investigating 4 different cyclospora outbreaks and it's likely there are multiple smaller outbreaks occurring at once. Cases of cyclospora typically increase during warm weather months, which can influence this perception.
- Further complicating these calculations is that cases of cyclospora have been steadily increasing over the past decade. According to [CDC data](#), there were 537 cases in 2016, and by 2023 (the latest data available), the number of cases had increased to 4,463.
- CDC has identified one outbreak with cases in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia that appear linked to each other. Michigan has been hit hardest, with 3,762 cases as of July 15.
- Other states have reported cyclospora cases, but their case numbers are within their typical annual average. Minnesota [told](#) Consumer Reports that they are not experiencing an increase in cases over what would be expected this time of year. California has seen fewer cases so far than over the same period in 2025.

What foods could be involved in the outbreak, and how long could it take to identify the source?

- Michigan is looking at "lettuce and salad greens" as a potential source based on early data, though other foods have not been ruled out. Products that often pose a higher risk for cyclospora based on historical data include packaged salads, romaine lettuce, raspberries, basil, cilantro, and green onions.
- Predicting how long it will take to identify the source can be tricky because of the many variables involved in an investigation. Michigan's chief medical executive told Consumer Reports that their review is "very, very manual" and hampered by "very antiquated data systems in public health that desperately need to be modernized." Comparatively limited funds provided to state foodborne illness surveillance programs were also blamed.
- It is possible that the source of some of the outbreaks won't ever be found, based on previous investigations. For example, of the four cyclospora outbreaks in 2023, there were three in which the source couldn't be identified.

Because of budget cuts, CDC was forced to stop monitoring cyclospora illnesses. Did this cause the outbreaks?

- No. FoodNet conducts surveillance and is not designed to prevent outbreaks. Plus, its surveillance area only covers 16% of the U.S. population.
- However, because the CDC was forced to cut cyclospora surveillance, it may have impacted the ability of the CDC and the FDA to identify the outbreak sooner to minimize the problem.
- Also, cuts to the FDA budget may have impacted the agency's ability to perform the lab tests that are integral part of a foodborne illness investigation.

What must change to lower the risk of cyclospora outbreaks?

- **Increase funding for the CDC.** This would allow the agency to restore tracking of cyclospora, and 7 other pathogens, through the FoodNet program. The CDC was forced to remove these pathogens from their surveillance list because of budget cuts. Additional funding also would allow the CDC to support critical state surveillance programs.
- **Increase funding for the FDA.** This would ensure the agency has the laboratory infrastructure and capacity to conduct thorough and expedited investigations.
- **Increase food safety research funding.** Scientists and investigators can't quickly distinguish how many different cyclospora outbreaks that may be occurring at once because of the inability to identify the different types of cyclospora that exist. Increased research funding would help scientists distinguish between separate outbreaks and potentially allow for quicker identification of suspected foods.
- **Implementation of a comprehensive food traceability system.** The ability to identify different types of cyclospora, combined with a robust food traceability system could play an important role in allowing investigators to more quickly identify outbreak sources and remove suspected products from store shelves.

What can consumers do? Should consumers avoid salads?

- For those living in Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky, Consumer Reports suggests avoiding eating lettuce and other salad greens until more information is available about the source of the outbreak.
- In states that are not part of the outbreak, following basic food safety rules can go a long way toward lowering foodborne illness risk in general. This includes washing hands with soap and water before and after preparing raw fruits and vegetables.
- Fruits and vegetables (even those labeled as prewashed) should be washed thoroughly under running water before eating, and scrub firmer foods, like melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush. It's important to do this before slicing into these foods to avoid transferring any outside contaminants to the inside.

To learn more about protecting yourself and your family, read CR's recent article:
[No, You Shouldn't Avoid Fruits and Vegetables Due to Cyclospora](#)

About Consumer Reports

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