

Cyclospora in 2026: What is Happening and What Must Change

Thousands of people across the United States have been sickened by cyclosporiasis, a gastrointestinal illness caused by a microscopic parasite (*Cyclospora cayetanensis*). Investigators have identified shredded lettuce from Taylor Farms as a likely source, primarily based on epidemiology. Consumer Reports 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 a common misconception that there is a single, nationwide outbreak. There is no evidence yet to confirm that. The FDA is currently investigating several 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.
- The FDA and CDC have identified one outbreak with cases in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. that appear linked. Michigan has the most cases so far.
- 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.

Why did it take a while to identify a potential source of the outbreak and did lack of funding play a role?

- Predicting how long it will take to identify the source of any foodborne illness outbreak can be tricky because of the many variables involved in an investigation. For the Cyclospora outbreak, 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 always a possibility that sources of outbreaks are never found, based on previous investigations. For example, of the four Cyclospora outbreaks in 2023, there were three in which the source was never identified. Products that often pose a higher risk for Cyclospora based on historical data include packaged salads, romaine lettuce, raspberries, basil, cilantro, and green onions.
- 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.

Has Taylor Farms been linked to previous outbreaks?

- Yes, Taylor Farms has been linked to other foodborne illness outbreaks.

2013: Salad mix from Taylor Farms was the [source](#) of a multistate Cyclospora outbreak involving Olive Garden and Red Lobster restaurants.

2015: Taylor Farms [recalled](#) a celery-and-onion mix linked to an E. coli outbreak in Costco salads.

2024: Taylor Farms was [identified](#) as the likely source of an E. coli outbreak linked to McDonald's Quarter Pounders that caused over a hundred illnesses and one death across 14 states. FDA inspectors [found](#) poor handwashing and dirty equipment at Taylor Farms processing plant in Colorado.

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.
- **Implementation of a comprehensive food traceability system.** The ability to identify different strains 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 stores.
- **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.

What can consumers do? Should consumers avoid salads?

- 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 prewashed) should be washed thoroughly under running water before eating, and scrub firmer foods, like melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush. This should be done before slicing into these foods to avoid transferring any outside contaminants to the inside.

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