

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 17, 2026

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya
Acting Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road NE
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Bhattacharya,

We write to request information about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s response to the ongoing multistate cyclosporiasis outbreak, and specifically whether staffing reductions or reorganization at the agency over the past year have affected your capacity to investigate and respond to it.

As you know, Cyclosporiasis is a foodborne parasitic disease that has been historically monitored and can cause prolonged gastrointestinal illness, dehydration, and hospitalization, particularly among older adults and immunocompromised individuals.¹² Behind the case counts are real people: days or weeks of debilitating illness, missed work and lost wages, medical bills for those hospitalized, and parents left uncertain about what's safe to put on the table for their kids. Because contaminated produce is often widely distributed through the food supply, rapidly identifying the source of an outbreak is critical to preventing additional illnesses. Delays in identifying the contaminated product also create significant uncertainty for consumers, who may avoid purchasing or consuming fresh fruits and vegetables more broadly out of caution for their safety, with downstream consequences for nutrition, public confidence, and the farmers and grocers who depend on that trust.³ Since May 1, 2026, CDC has received reports of 1,645 confirmed domestic cases of cyclosporiasis, with more than 5,100 additional reported cases still requiring analysis to confirm domestic acquisition, a substantial increase over the 249 cases reported nationally by this point last year.⁴ Of the confirmed cases, 141 (9%) have required hospitalization. As of July 13, more than 400 cases have been linked to a multistate cluster spanning Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky, in which investigators have since identified Taylor Farms shredded iceberg lettuce, supplied to some Taco Bell locations, as a potential, though still unconfirmed, source.⁵

Outbreaks of this scale and duration depend on CDC's surveillance, laboratory, and epidemiological staff to trace a source quickly and limit further illness. Given the reported

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Foodborne Outbreaks*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://www.cdc.gov/foodborne-outbreaks/about/index.html>. Accessed 16 July 2026.

2 CDC, "About FoodNet," Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, <https://www.cdc.gov/foodnet/about/index.html>.

3 Terlep, Sharon. "Parasitic Outbreak Puts Big Lettuce in PR Crisis Mode." *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 July 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/business/parasitic-outbreak-puts-big-lettuce-in-pr-crisis-mode-db62f6f6>. Accessed 16 July 2026.

4 CDC, "Domestically Acquired Cyclosporiasis Cases in Multiple U.S. States, 2026," HAN Notice, <https://www.cdc.gov/han/php/notices/han00531.html>.

5 Jewett, Christina, et al. "Cyclospora Linked to Taylor Farms Lettuce Sent to Taco Bell." *The New York Times*, 16 July 2026, www.nytimes.com/2026/07/16/well/cyclospora-taylor-farms-lettuce-taco-bell.html.

staffing reductions, hiring freezes, and leadership turnover at CDC over the past year, we are concerned about whether the agency currently has the personnel and resources it needs to stop this outbreak. Additionally, the Foodborne Disease Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet) is a collaboration between CDC, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), FDA, and 10 state health departments. Historically, the FoodNet monitored eight pathogens, including Cyclospora. On July 1, 2025, FoodNet made data reporting optional for all pathogens, except Salmonella and Shiga-toxin-producing E. coli (STEC).⁶ We request answers to the following questions by July 30, 2026, and ask that your staff also make themselves available for a briefing for offices to walk through the agency's response in more detail:

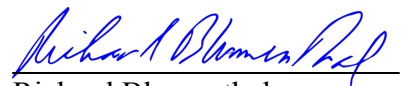
1. Has CDC's capacity to investigate and respond to this outbreak been affected by staffing reductions, hiring freezes, attrition, or agency-wide reorganization over the past year? If so, please describe how.
2. What is the current staffing level in the divisions responsible for cyclosporiasis surveillance and foodborne outbreak response, compared with staffing at the start of 2025?
3. What specific steps is CDC taking, in coordination with state health departments and FDA, to identify the source of this outbreak and prevent additional cases?
4. Has CDC or FDA confirmed Taylor Farms lettuce as the source of this outbreak? If not, what specific evidence or testing remains outstanding before that determination can be made public, and what is the timeline for reaching a conclusion?
5. Does CDC believe the shift to optional reporting has delayed or reduced case detection in this outbreak, and is CDC considering reinstating mandatory Cyclospora reporting under FoodNet in light of this outbreak's scale?
6. What is CDC's timeline for issuing updated public guidance to consumers and health care providers as the investigation progresses?
7. How many days, on average, does it currently take to confirm and trace a case of Cyclospora, and what steps is CDC taking to reduce this timeframe?

Thank you for your attention to this urgent public health matter. We look forward to your response and to scheduling a briefing at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

⁶ CDC, "About FoodNet," Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, <https://www.cdc.gov/foodnet/about/index.html>.