

Cyclosporiasis cases in Maryland up 59% since last week

'We call it the explosive diarrhea rule. Nobody thinks about the public health system until there's a problem,' Dr. Josh Sharfstein says



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PUBLISHED: July 22, 2026 at 3:29 PM EDT

While [cyclosporiasis cases](#) continue to climb in Maryland, more infections seem to be coming from international travel than from food eaten in the state, officials said Wednesday.

The Maryland Health Department on Wednesday reported 110 cases so far in 2026, [41 more than last week](#). Of that total, 27 cases were traced to local sources, 47 people caught the parasite internationally, while 36 cases remain under investigation.

Overall, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recorded 1,645 cases, including 141 hospitalizations in 34 states since the beginning of May.

Health officials said the outbreak of [explosive diarrhea](#) caused by the Cyclospora parasite seems to be waning, but also warn that the danger is not past.

The department wrote in an emailed statement that the national outbreak has not been identified as the major source of cyclosporiasis cases reported in the state of Maryland.

"Investigations are ongoing and, to date, Maryland's health departments have not identified a common link for cases reported in 2026," the department wrote in an emailed statement.

Nationally, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration remains focused on iceberg lettuce from Taylor Farms de Mexico, a subsidiary of Taylor Fresh Foods of Salinas, California, as the likely source of the Cyclospora outbreak. [Cases of cyclosporiasis](#) were linked to food with lettuce served at Taco Bell restaurants in Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio and West Virginia.

On Sunday, the FDA walked back a report that the parasite had been identified on lettuce from another Taylor production facility, not in Mexico, calling that test a "false positive." To date, the administration says no tests have revealed the presence of cyclospora on produce, but says "do not eat" voluntarily recalled lettuce from Taylor Farms de Mexico.

The outbreak has put a national spotlight on public health infrastructure, said Dr. Josh Sharfstein, former Maryland Secretary of Health and director of the Bloomberg American Health Initiative at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

“We call it the explosive diarrhea rule,” Sharfstein said. “Nobody thinks about the public health system until there’s a problem.”

Unanswered questions

[The CDC cautions](#) that the only sure way to destroy a parasite like cyclospora is cooking to 158 degrees — which doesn’t improve lettuce. Washing produce is still recommended, but common cleaning methods for leafy greens and lettuce, such as using a solution of soap, bleach or vinegar, won’t kill the parasite. Scrubbing harder fruits and vegetables can physically remove it from the surface, and buying whole heads of lettuce and discarding the outer two or three layers is more effective.

Tracking the pathogen has been difficult, health officials say, also because it’s a parasite. Cyclospora passes through several life stages, only becoming dangerous after about two weeks of warm temperatures above 70 degrees. Unlike other food-borne illnesses, which can cause symptoms within hours, cyclosporiasis also has an incubation period of two days to a week, further complicating efforts to trace the source of the outbreak. The first cases of explosive diarrhea tied to this outbreak began in May, the CDC reports.

Tracing the source is critical to preventing another outbreak.

“We need to understand the root cause and how we control it,” Dr. David Acheson, president & CEO of The Acheson Group Consulting Company, told Sharfstein on a [Public Health On Call](#) podcast. “It’s July. It’s going to be hot for a while, and we don’t want another spike coming in August.”

Stay hydrated

If you do get sick, get treatment and stay hydrated. The most prominent symptom, diarrhea, can kill vulnerable people through dehydration, according to MedChi, the Maryland State Medical Society.

Unlike more common stomach viruses that resolve within a day or two, untreated cyclosporiasis can last weeks. Symptoms even seem to improve and then return.

“What can you do to avoid it? That’s the challenge. We all want to eat more leafy greens and vegetables. It’s good for us,” Acheson said. “We do trust our public health officials and the industry to get this right, and they usually do.”

Have a news tip? Contact Karl Hille at 443-900-7891 or khille@baltsun.com.