



Erie County Health Department
An Accredited Public Health Department

Erie County Community Health Center
A Federally Qualified Health Center

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Health Commissioner



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Erie County Health Department is Investigating Confirmed Cyclosporiasis Cases in Erie County

July 13, 2026 SANDUSKY, OH – The Erie County Board of Health is requesting that all residents and commercial food establishments properly wash all fruits and vegetables prior to use. The Erie County Health Department has launched an active investigation following multiple laboratory-confirmed cases of cyclosporiasis within Erie County. Cyclosporiasis is a prolonged, painful gastrointestinal illness caused by the microscopic parasite *Cyclospora cayetanensis*.

Because the summer months mark the peak season for this parasite, and multiple states, including neighboring regions in Northern Ohio, are experiencing an active surge in cases, the Erie County Board of Health is issuing an immediate advisory. We are requesting targeted action from the general community, local healthcare networks, and specifically our commercial kitchens, restaurants, and large food vendors to help mitigate and contain the spread of this illness.

Symptoms and Transmission

Cyclosporiasis is a foodborne illness typically contracted by consuming fresh produce or water contaminated with microscopic amounts of human feces. Direct person-to-person transmission is highly unlikely. The parasite requires one to two weeks in the environment outside the body before it becomes infectious, meaning you cannot catch it directly from a brief interaction with an infected individual. Instead, the risk stems entirely from contaminated food or water handling.

What to Look For:

Symptoms usually appear about one week (ranging from 2 days to 2 weeks) after consuming contaminated produce. If left untreated, symptoms can last from several weeks to more than a month, and frequently return in waves after an initial period of improvement.

- Watery, frequent, or explosive diarrhea (the most common symptom)
- Severe abdominal cramps and bloating
- Prolonged fatigue and body aches
- Loss of appetite and subsequent weight loss
- Nausea and low-grade fever

Directive for Restaurants and Food Vendors

Because no single food item or specific supplier has yet been identified as the root source of this regional spike, commercial food businesses must escalate their food handling safety protocols. Past outbreaks have heavily implicated raw, imported produce like pre-washed bagged salad mixes, cilantro, basil, green onions, raspberries, and snow peas.



The Board of Health is advising all food service operations to execute the following two-pronged mitigation strategy:

1. Mandatory Safe Handling & Produce-Specific Washing Protocols

The Cyclospora parasite is sticky and resilient; standard chemical sanitizers do not easily destroy it. Food prep staff must strictly isolate unwashed produce from ready-to-eat items to prevent cross-contamination. Always thoroughly wash hands, cutting boards, and knives after handling unwashed fruits and vegetables before moving on to clean food or prepping plates. Proper mechanical friction under clean, running water is required.

- **Leafy Greens & Lettuce:** During this investigation, vendors are strongly encouraged to purchase whole heads of lettuce instead of pre-washed, pre-cut bagged salad mixes. Discard the outer 2 to 3 layers of leaves entirely, and wash the inner leaves thoroughly under cold running water.
- **Herbs (Cilantro, Basil):** Separate the leaves completely and wash thoroughly under a stream of running water.
- **Green Onions (Scallions):** Trim the root end and discard the outer layer completely before washing under running water.
- **Berries (Raspberries, Blackberries):** The bumpy surfaces of fresh berries contain tiny crevices where the parasite can easily hide. Wash them thoroughly. If serving vulnerable populations, consider using cooked or frozen alternatives, as heat effectively destroys the parasite.
- **Firm Produce (Melons, Cucumbers):** Scrub the exterior surfaces vigorously with a clean produce brush under running water before cutting.
- **The "Cook When You Can" Rule:** Whenever practical, cooking vegetables and herbs is the safest choice, as heat completely neutralizes the parasite.

2. Strict Sick Leave Enforcement

In accordance with the Ohio Administrative Code, any food service employees or individuals in sensitive occupations who exhibit diarrheal symptoms must be excluded from food handling operations. They are not permitted to return to work until their diarrhea has completely ceased and they have been started on an effective antibiotic regimen.

Community Guidance — "What Not to Do"

To ensure the safety of the wider community and protect our local recreational waters, residents must observe strict personal boundaries if they are sick.



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- **DO NOT swim if you are ill:** If you are currently experiencing diarrhea, or are recovering from a confirmed or suspected case of cyclosporiasis, do not enter public pools, hot tubs, water parks, lakes, or splash pads. symptoms subside. Accidental fecal contamination in recreational waters can easily spread the parasite to hundreds of other swimmers.
- **DO NOT handle food for others:** If you have symptoms, do not prepare meals for family members, friends, or coworkers until you have completely recovered.
- **DO NOT rely on routine stool tests:** If you have been suffering from persistent diarrhea for more than a few days, see your doctor and explicitly mention Cyclospora.

Important Note for Erie County Healthcare Providers

The Erie County Board of Health reminds all area clinicians and medical facilities that there is no in-house test for cyclospora; all testing samples must be sent to outside labs. Cyclospora is not detected by routine Ova and Parasite (O&P) examinations.

Because of the influx of gastrointestinal illnesses, if a patient presents with persistent, watery diarrhea and you suspect cyclosporiasis, please proceed immediately with a full gastrointestinal panel through your contracted laboratory testing partner

Cyclosporiasis is a legally reportable disease in Ohio. Please ensure that all positive laboratory findings are immediately report to the Erie County Health Department so that our epidemiological team can conduct timely patient interviews and trace the contamination source.

Contact Information for Inquiries

For specific questions regarding the advisory:

- **Medical & Public Health Questions:** If you are a medical provider needing clarification on testing/reporting, or a member of the general public with questions regarding symptoms and disease transmission, please contact ECHD's Epidemiologist, Taylor Kula, at 419-626-5623, Ext. 5103.
- **Commercial & Food Safety Inquiries:** If you are a restaurant owner, commercial kitchen manager, or food vendor seeking guidance on safe handling practices and compliance, please contact ECHD's Environmental Health Director, Mark Janowich, at 419-626-5623, Ext. 5108.

About Erie County Health Department:

The Erie County Health Department remains dedicated to improving the health and wellness of all residents through accessible, compassionate, and comprehensive healthcare services. ECHD operates the Erie County Community Health Center, the Erie County Detox, Kaptur Rogowski House, and Compass Point, providing adult day services for Alzheimer's and Dementia patients.

For more information about Health Department or Health Center services, visit www.ErieCoHealthOhio.com.