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## **The Outbreak**

As of mid-Jun 2026, we have been experiencing an unusually large outbreak of cyclosporiasis, a gastrointestinal illness caused by the microscopic parasite *Cyclospora cayetanensis*. Cases have been reported across multiple states, with particularly high numbers in Ohio and neighboring Michigan. Health departments continue to search for the cause of the outbreak, but no specific food item or source has yet been identified.

## **Cyclospora: The Facts**

Cyclospora is a tiny parasite and does not have an animal host. It occurs only in humans and requires environment such as water or soil to complete its life cycle. The parasite is shed by sick individuals and becomes infective after 1–2 weeks in the environment.

Symptoms of cyclospora infections include watery diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, fatigue, fever, and weight loss. Symptoms may come back if untreated, while some infected individuals may not even show symptoms. Because of this and the fact that the symptoms may take longer time to develop, finding the source of a Cyclospora outbreak can take a long time.

Cyclosporiasis outbreaks have been commonly associated with the contaminated water and fresh produce. The general route of produce contamination is through contaminated irrigation water or soil. Because human waste is the main reservoir of the parasite, agricultural water may get contaminated after storms and floods. Chlorine and other antimicrobial chemicals are not effective against Cyclospora. Techniques like microfiltration, ozone, and UV treatment are necessary to effectively treat irrigation water.



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## ***Tips for growers to reduce the risk of Cyclospora***

- Provide **accessible toilets, handwashing facilities, potable water, and hygiene training** to prevent human fecal contamination
- Exclude workers with **diarrhea or cyclosporiasis symptoms** from harvesting, packing, or handling produce until recovery. If anyone on your farm is experiencing gastrointestinal illness, encourage them to contact their health provider. Cyclospora is not a part of routine testing, so the specific test for Cyclospora may have to be requested.
- Establish **contingency plans for extreme weather events and natural disasters** such as flooding, storm, or tornado damage.

## ***General produce food safety measures***

- Implement **Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs)** throughout growing, harvesting, packing, and storage.
- Conduct **pre-harvest agricultural water assessments** and reassess after significant changes that may introduce contamination risks.
- Perform **environmental risk assessments** before harvest and delay harvesting if contamination risks are identified.
- Protect irrigation water sources from **sewage leaks, septic failures, wastewater discharge, flooding, and runoff**.
- Use **potable water for produce washing** and maintain proper **sanitation** of food-contact surfaces, equipment, containers, and packing areas.
- Maintain **traceability records** (field locations, harvest dates, lot numbers, and distribution details) to support traceback and recalls.
- Develop and maintain a **written farm food safety plan** with hazard assessments, monitoring, documentation, and corrective actions aligned with FSMA Produce Safety Rule requirements.
- Provide **regular food safety training on hygiene, illness reporting, sanitation, and contamination prevention**

### Sources:

- CDC Cyclosporiasis Surveillance Update (July 2026); CDC Cyclosporiasis Information; Ohio Department of Health outbreak updates.
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2025, April 15). *Cyclosporiasis and fresh produce*.

### Questions? Contact:

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