

# Cyclospora Explodes Across America



By Alex Berezow — October 5, 2018



Credit: Storyblocks [1]

We are currently undergoing an explosive outbreak of *Cyclospora*, a curious little critter that causes diarrhea. Scientists know almost nothing about it.

Earlier this year, several people got sick from *Cyclospora* in two separate outbreaks, one from [McDonald's salads](#) [2] and another from Del Monte vegetable trays sold at Kwik Trip convenience stores. All together, this year, nearly 2,300 people have gotten sick with *Cyclospora*, a 270% increase over 2017 and a whopping 1221% increase over 2016. What is going on?

Nobody knows. Not even the CDC. There are no good tools to track the bug genetically, so the only information that public health officials have is epidemiologic. Only roughly 1/3 of this year's cases have been linked to McDonald's and Del Monte vegetable trays, which means that 2/3 of the cases are unexplained. So, where are they coming from?

In its latest report, the CDC suggests that perhaps changes in testing practices are to blame. If more hospitals are aware of *Cyclospora*, more will test for it... and more will find it. Of course, it's also possible that the increase is real because there's more *Cyclospora* in our food. We simply don't know.

Is there anything you can do not to be poisoned by *Cyclospora*? Not really. You can wash your vegetables in the hope of rinsing the microbes off, but bear in mind that these little guys aren't killed by chlorinated water.

**Why We Should Irradiate Our Food Supply**

There is something society could do, however, to make foodborne outbreaks far less likely: Irradiation. [ACSH has endorsed this policy](#) [3] for 36 years.

The [CDC estimates](#) [4] that 48 million people get sick from food poisoning annually, hospitalizing around 128,000 and killing 3,000. Imagine the billions of dollars in unnecessary healthcare costs and lost productivity that could be saved if we irradiated our food supply.

Of course, food irradiation is not a magic bullet. It doesn't work well against viruses. But it works well enough that the [FDA has approved its use](#) [5] for all sorts of foods. Not only would it kill many potential pathogens, it would kill bacteria that spoil food, [increasing its shelf life and reducing food waste](#) [6]. It's a win-win.

Unfortunately, Americans are afraid of the word "radiation," which is one reason why most of our food is not irradiated. It's time to overcome our collective ignorance and implement a common sense food safety policy.

**Source** [3]: Casillas SM, Bennett C, Straily A. "Notes from the Field: Multiple Cyclosporiasis Outbreaks — United States, 2018." *MMWR* 67(39): 1101-1102. Published: 5-October-2018. DOI: 10.15585/mmwr.mm6739a6.

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**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/10/05/cyclospora-explodes-across-america-13482>

**Links**

[1] <https://www.storyblocks.com/stock-image/vegetables-schgeakixo-j6gplx06>

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/07/31/mcdonalds-outbreak-what-cyclospora-13252>

[3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2003/05/01/irradiated-foods-2>

[4] <https://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/estimates-overview.html>

[5] <https://www.fda.gov/food/ingredientspackaginglabeling/irradiatedfoodpackaging/ucm261680.htm>

[6] <http://ansnuclearcafe.org/2011/06/09/food-irradiation-a-global-perspective-future-prospects/#sthash.hFWRwJef.dpbs>