

The largest tuberculosis outbreak in US history is unfolding as President Trump “paused” all public messaging by the CDC

This is exactly the time you'd want clear and transparent communication from health organizations.



by **Mihai Andrei** — January 29, 2025 Reading Time: 4 mins read

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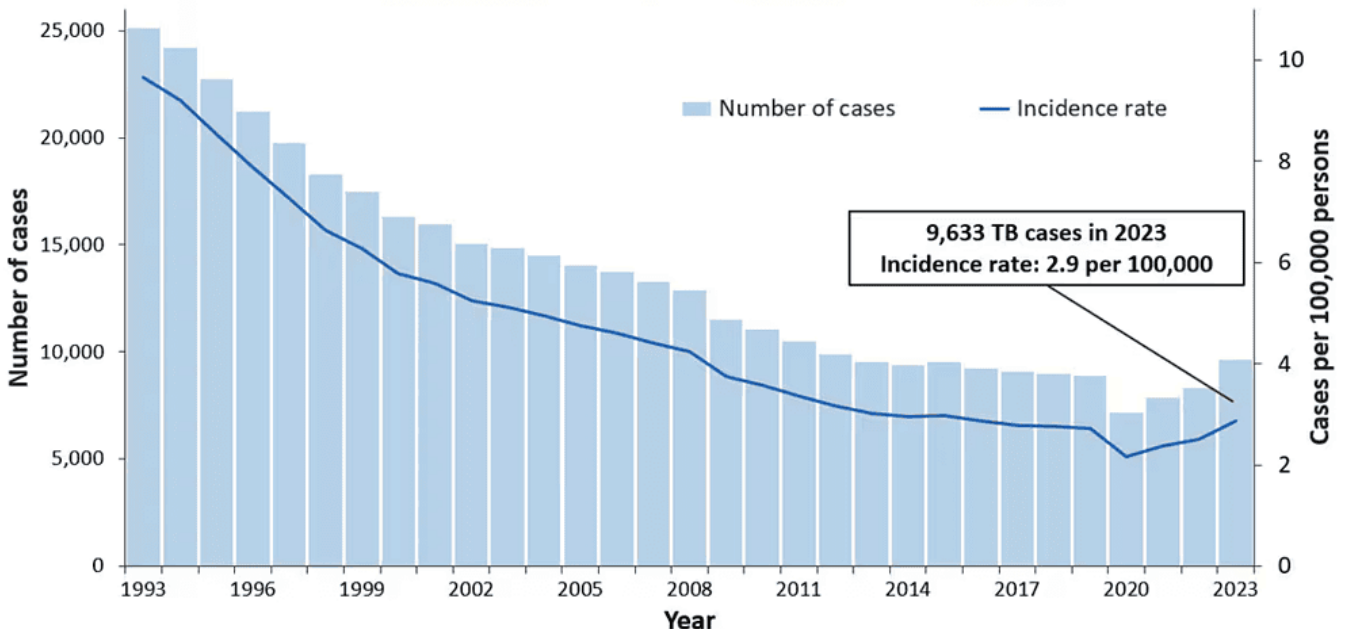


Kansas City is currently facing the largest documented tuberculosis (TB) outbreak in the United States. According to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), there are 67 active TB cases and 79 latent cases, with most occurring in Wyandotte County.

The KDHE, guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is working to contain the outbreak and ensure proper treatment for affected individuals. However, CDC communication efforts remain hampered by [a Trump administration order](#) barring public health messaging.

“The current Kansas City, Kan. Metro tuberculosis (TB) outbreak is the largest documented outbreak in U.S. history, presently (since the 1950s, when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) started monitoring and reporting TB cases),” KDHE communications director Jill Bronaugh [told CIDRAP News](#) in an email. “This outbreak is still ongoing, which means that there could be more cases.”

TB Cases and Incidence Rates, United States, 1993–2023



📷 Tuberculosis had been declining but is now rising since 2020. Image credits: CDC.

TB is a highly infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It primarily affects the lungs but can spread to other parts of the body, including the brain, kidneys, and spine. It spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes, making it highly contagious, especially in crowded or poorly ventilated areas.

What makes TB particularly dangerous is its ability to remain dormant in a latent state for years, activating when the immune system weakens. Drug-resistant strains have further complicated treatment, as they reduce the effectiveness of standard antibiotics, leading to prolonged illnesses and higher mortality rates. TB remains one of the world’s deadliest infectious diseases, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations with limited access to healthcare.

However, with proper care, TB is often very treatable. Even so, the current US outbreak has killed two people so far.

“While there is a very low risk of infection to the general public in these communities, KDHE is working to ensure that patients are receiving appropriate treatment, which will limit the ability to spread this disease and prevent additional cases from occurring,” Bronaugh said.

TB on the rise in the US

This outbreak dates to at least [2021](#), according to the CDC. It was traced to Kansas residents who had visited the Federated States of Micronesia. Ever since, it has not been eliminated.

Tuberculosis as a whole seems to be on the rise in the US. In 2023, 9,633 cases were reported, the highest count since 2013. Cases have been rising for three straight years.

In a 2023 statement, [the CDC](#) linked America’s TB to pressure put on the medical staff by the COVID-19 pandemic response.

“This outbreak in an urban, at-risk community resulted in tremendous financial, staffing, and capacity strain on the local public health department, where capacity was already diminished after nearly 2 years of COVID-19 pandemic response; however, recent collaborations established during COVID-19 prevention activities led to many positive working relationships with community partners such as the schools and hospitals, which facilitated efficient coordination of the outbreak response. “

“This outbreak is also a cautionary tale, reminding other low TB incidence jurisdictions that sustained declines in TB incidence are not assured. Successful TB treatment and prevention requires ongoing identification and treatment of LTBI and a swift multifaceted public health response for each person newly diagnosed with TB.”

Now that the Trump administration has paused all [public messaging from the CDC](#) and other health agencies, this outbreak could be made worse unless the memorandum is lifted as soon as possible.

Globally, the World Health Organization estimates that 10.8 million people fell ill with TB worldwide, [including](#) 1.3 million children.



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