

U.S. CDC in Central America



Staff members of Colectivo Amigos Contra el SIDA (CAS), a free HIV and sexually transmitted disease prevention clinic for men-who-have-sex-with-men, in Guatemala City. Credit: Nick Tenorio/CDC

CDC has been present in Central America since the 1960s and established a Central America office in Guatemala in 2003. The office primarily supports work in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama. Selected activities beyond Central America—in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Peru—are also supported. CDC Central America works closely with Ministries of Health (MOHs) and partner organizations to address public health work in global health security, HIV, tuberculosis (TB), COVID-19, and migration health.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS



More than 4,929 residents have graduated from Frontline Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) in Central America.



Since 2019, CDC has trained more than 4,000 laboratory personnel.



CDC partners with over 44 HIV clinics in Central America and has facilitated providing HIV prevention services to over 56,000 people, HIV testing for over 123,000 people, and HIV treatment for over 31,000 people.



CDC collaborates with ministries of agriculture, health, environment, and defense across Central America to conduct One Health Zoonotic Disease Prioritization workshops to prioritize diseases for epidemiological surveillance, prevention, and control.



Since 2017, CDC has participated in outbreak investigations for multiple health emergencies such as measles, rabies, fungal infections, dengue, foodborne diseases, and COVID-19.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Global health security

CDC supports disease surveillance, outbreak response, laboratory systems, and workforce development in coordination with local, regional, and global public health organizations.

Surveillance strengthening

Since 2018, CDC Central America has worked with partners to strengthen surveillance for key infectious disease pathogens and antimicrobial resistance in Belize, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Guatemala. CDC's acute febrile illness surveillance network in Central America and the Dominican Republic identifies emerging and re-emerging disease threats, strengthens regional collaborations, and increases capacity to use data for decision-making.

CDC collaborates with ministries of agriculture, environment, defense, and health across Central America to conduct One Health Zoonotic Disease Prioritization workshops to increase opportunities for cross-disciplinary surveillance, prevention, and control of zoonotic diseases.

Laboratory strengthening

For the past 20 years, CDC Central America has supported laboratory-based disease surveillance and detection of novel strains and pathogens. CDC also supports the Regional Network of National Laboratories strategic plan. Alongside training laboratory staff and strengthening biosafety across the region, other activities include:

- Strengthening genomic surveillance in Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama.
- Increasing diagnosis of fungal diseases in Belize and El Salvador.
- Enhancing surveillance of norovirus and rotavirus in Costa Rica.

Workforce development

The Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) strengthens the public health workforce capacity to investigate and respond to disease outbreaks through three tiers (frontline, intermediate, and advanced). Advanced FETP participants earn a master's degree in epidemiology through Universidad del Valle-Guatemala. During the COVID-19 response, FETP graduates together with CDC's implementing partners led efforts to increase vaccination rates and provide epidemiological support to MOHs.

Emergency response

Since 2017, CDC has participated in outbreak investigations for multiple health emergencies such as measles, rabies, fungal infections, dengue, foodborne diseases, and COVID-19.

Established relationships between CDC and MOHs helped to quickly expand regional laboratory capacities and surveillance during the region's COVID-19 response. CDC activities included:

- Expanding existing surveillance platforms to include COVID-19 testing and supporting COVID 19 vaccination activities.

- Donating critically needed laboratory equipment and supplies.
- Increasing genomic sequencing capacity throughout the region.
- Using serological surveys to understand the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infection.

HIV and TB

Since 2003, CDC has collaborated with MOHs, community-based organizations, and international partners to respond to the HIV epidemic in Central America. This includes scaling up evidence-based programs that close gaps in HIV prevention, case finding, optimize treatment, and viral load suppression. CDC Central America supports countries to achieve UNAIDS 95-95-95 goals by 2030 by:

- Expanding HIV combination prevention strategies.
- Increasing HIV testing access and knowledge of HIV status.
- Improving health outcomes among people living with HIV.
- Preventing and treating opportunistic infections such as TB.
- Strengthening HIV treatment retention and viral load suppression.
- Increasing laboratory capacity to test for HIV and monitor viral loads. and increasing workforce capacity among healthcare workers.
- Addressing stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV.

Migration and border health

Global migration impacts the health of migrants and the potential spread of diseases, including across borders. CDC works with partners to improve HIV services for Venezuelan migrants, enhance border health systems, and understand health-related reasons for migration.

CDC has conducted trainings on surveillance, public health policy, preventing cross-border spread of diseases, and responding to health emergencies at points of entry. CDC has also enhanced HIV prevention, care, and treatment services for migrants throughout Central America. Other CDC activities have included:

- Identifying challenges in detecting and responding to health threats among populations moving within and out of Central America.
- Supporting COVID-19 testing and vaccination for migrants returning to Central America from the U.S. and Mexico.
- Developing or revising public health emergency plans and standard operating procedures to detect and respond to ill travelers at points of entry in El Salvador and Honduras.
- Supporting strengthened information-sharing and collaboration between Costa Rica and Panama to facilitate coordinated responses to health threats that may spread across an international border.



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