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Outdoors, B6

Cyclosporiasis hits tri-county area

Intestinal illness cases pop up in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren

By LOUISE WREGE
HP Staff Writer

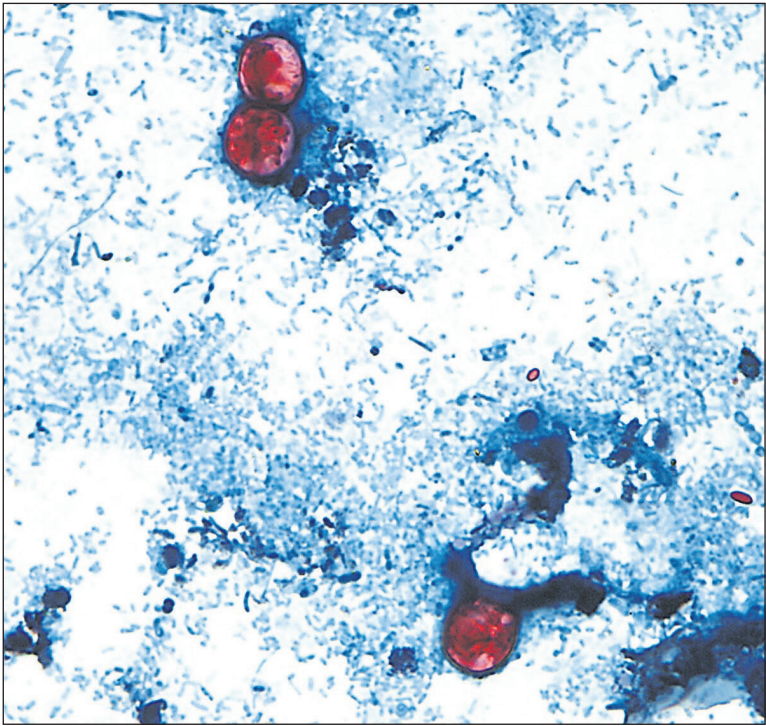
BENTON TOWNSHIP — The intestinal illness that causes explosive diarrhea has reached Southwest Michigan, with 23 cases reported so far in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties.

In Michigan, cyclosporiasis has been confirmed in 3,309 cases as of Tuesday — a significant increase from the 170 cases reported on June 30 by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. As of July 9, 44 people had been hospitalized with the illness. The first case was reported to the state on June 22.

In a typical year, the state sees 40-50 cases of cyclosporiasis, according to MDHHS.

So far, the number of cases of cyclosporiasis that have been confirmed locally are seven in Berrien County, 12 in Van Buren County and four in Cass County.

The ailment is caused by the cyclospora parasite, which can't be seen with the naked eye, according to



Melanie Moser / CDC

This undated photo taken through a microscope shows *Cyclospora cayetanensis* oocysts found in a fresh stool sample which had been prepared with a formalin solution and stained with safranin.

Sara Palmer, an epidemiologist with the Berrien County Health Department.

"You have to use a microscope to

see it," Palmer said.
She said local health departments

See **PARASITE**, page A2

As cyclospora illnesses surge to a record, Michigan officials eye lettuce as a possible cause

By MIKE STOBBE
Associated Press

Michigan officials blame lettuce

NEW YORK — Infections from the diarrhea-causing parasite cyclospora are surging, with state-level data suggesting that 2026 is already the nation's worst year for reported cases.

More than 30 states have reported infections this year, and current data from them shows the number of infections surpassing the record U.S. mark of about 4,700 set in 2019. The illness is not usually life threatening and is typically treated with antibiotics.

Health officials have not yet definitively identified what is causing the infections. On Tuesday, federal health officials said there may be different infection patterns in different places, although they believe cases in at least four states — Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia — are linked.

In Michigan — where more than 3,300 cases have been reported — officials say early information points to lettuce or salad greens as a possible culprit.

After conducting more than 1,000 interviews with patients, "early information has shown lettuce as a common product that regularly comes up during the investigation," said Natasha Bagdasarian, the Michigan health department's chief medical executive.

Because of that commonality and because produce has been behind some past cyclospora outbreaks, Michigan officials advised consumers to buy whole heads of lettuce, discard the outer layers and thoroughly wash what is left. They also suggested people avoid bagged lettuce and pre-mixed

See **LETTUCE**, page A6



Don Campbell / HP staff

Berrien County Sheriff Chuck Heit was elected sheriff in 2024 after serving as interim sheriff and undersheriff for two decades. He graduated from New Buffalo High School in 1987, then went to Central Michigan University where he majored in sociology, with a concentration in criminal justice.

A lawful calling

Heit finds a focus in community as Berrien County sheriff

By JULIE SWIDWA
HP Correspondent

Editor's note: This is part four in a 10-part series The Herald-Palladium is publishing for its Spotlight section, which highlights local residents and their impact in the community.

ST. JOSEPH — When Chuck Heit was 5 years old, he told his parents he wanted to be a Michigan State Police trooper.

"That was when there was a state police post in New Buffalo," Heit recalled. "My parents were supportive, although I didn't end up at the state police."

However, now as the Berrien County sheriff, Heit says he wouldn't change a thing.

"I always wanted to go into law enforcement. I wanted to help people," Heit said. "It's been a very good career. I've worked with a lot of good people."

Heit, 56, was born in Adrian, Mich., but his family moved to New Buffalo when he was 3 years old — a move that coincided with his father accepting a job as an elementary school principal there.

He graduated from New Buffalo High School in 1987, then went to Central Michigan University where he majored in sociology,

Highlights

Name: Chuck Heit
Title: Berrien County sheriff
Hometown: New Buffalo
Fun fact: He ran a Chicago Marathon in 2012.

with a concentration in criminal justice. He also owned a boat cleaning business in New Buffalo from 1988-89.

While at CMU, he worked summers as a patrol officer for the Berrien County Sheriff's Department

Marine Division.

In 1992, he left CMU to go to the police academy in Kalamazoo.

He then was hired as a patrol officer in Buchanan, and ultimately served as chief of police there from February 1993 to 1999. At the same time, he was hired into the Berrien County Sheriff's Department, where he worked first as a jail deputy, then a road patrol deputy and served on the sheriff's tactical response unit.

In May 1999, he was hired as chief of police in New Buffalo, where he served until May 2002,

See **HEIT**, page A2

SJ officials debate e-mobility devices, possible ordinance

By LAUREN RICE
HP Staff Writer

ST. JOSEPH — St. Joseph is in the process of developing an ordinance to guide the use of e-mobility devices in the city.

It's something staff have been looking into for some time, but it came up at a previous city commission meeting.

City Manager Emily Hackworth presented that research, as well as staff recommendations, during the commission meeting Monday.

"Our recommendation is that we ban all electric mobility devices on the sidewalks in the d-downtown district, consistent with our existing ban on recreational mobile devices," she said.

Other recommendations include:

- Allowing class one and two e-bikes on streets, sidewalks and non-motorized paths.
- Prohibiting class three e-bikes on streets, sidewalks and non-motorized paths.
- Requiring users to have a method of notifying other path-users of their approach.
- Prohibiting the use of all e-mobility devices on non-paved trails within the city.
- Requiring all users under 18 years old to wear a helmet.

The staff recommendations also included an education campaign to inform the public about new regulations and other best practices and safety recommendations.

There was no vote held on Monday, but commissioners had

See **E-MOBILITY**, page A2