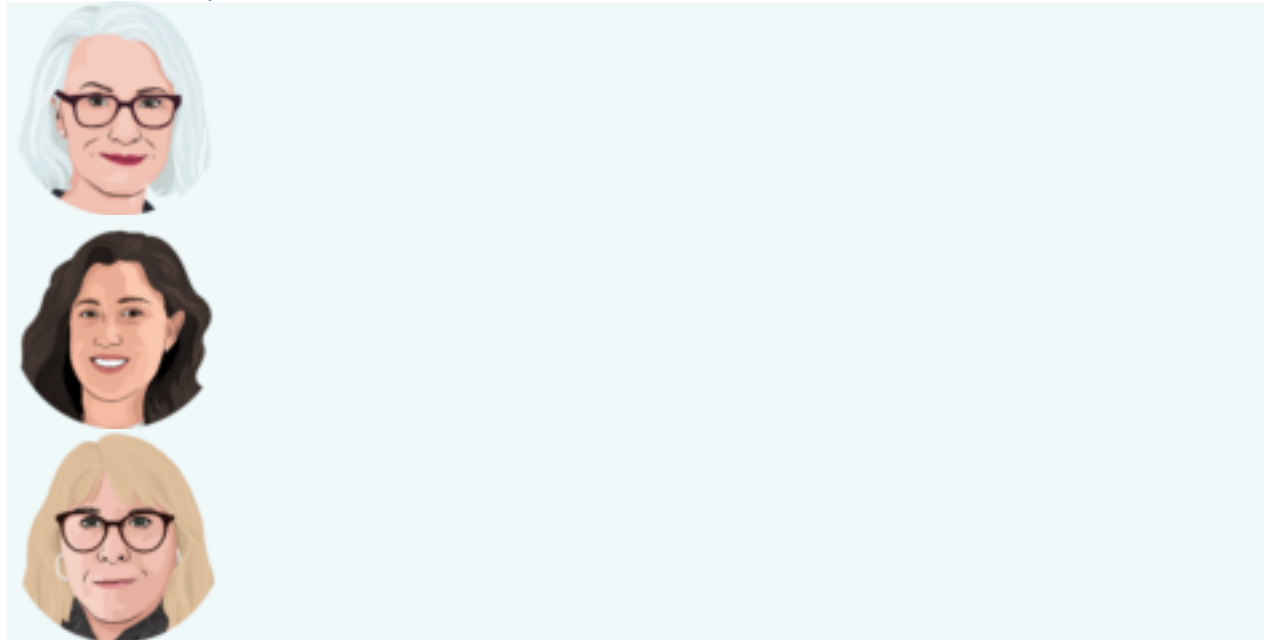


# ‘It’s a massacre’: CDC battered by government shutdown firings

Terminations have decimated offices related to injury prevention, disease surveillance

CDC supporters rally outside a meeting of the agency’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices on Sept. 19 in Chamblee, Ga. *Elijah Nouvelage/Getty Images*



By [Elizabeth Cooney](#), [Chelsea Cirruzzo](#), and [Helen Branswell](#)

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WASHINGTON — The White House’s mass firing of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention staff on Friday has decimated offices related to injury prevention, respiratory disease surveillance, and chronic disease, according to four people familiar with the cuts.

Overall, the White House is expected to cut between 1,100 and 1,200 employees at the Department of Health and Human Services, though it’s not yet clear how many will come from the CDC. HHS hasn’t released official numbers on the cuts, but most anecdotal reports related to health agency firings have centered around the CDC. The American Federation of Government Employees has challenged previous firings of federal workers and said Friday in a social media post that it was filing a lawsuit in response to overall government firings. AFGE did not respond to a request for comment on Saturday.

The terminations — which may continue into the weekend — came after President Trump made good on threats to axe federal workers as the government shutdown drags into a third week. Trump has blamed the shutdown on congressional Democrats and has pledged at the White House in the past few days that these firings, which are not typical for a government shutdown, would hit “Democrat” programs.

One high-ranking CDC official who just lost their job disputed characterizations of the cuts as the natural consequence of a shutdown, instead calling it the weaponization of one.

“The executive branch is using the shutdown as cover for an intentional and targeted dismantling of leadership across the agency. It’s designed to sow chaos, demoralize career staff, and cripple the federal scientific infrastructure that protects Americans’ health,” the official told STAT. “Calling this a budget issue is a lie. It’s an abuse of power — unethical, unlawful, and profoundly dangerous.”

The official said it appears that major cuts were made to the leadership of multiple centers, removing the office of director from many of them.

“It’s a massacre,” the official told STAT Saturday on condition of anonymity because of continuing connections to people at the CDC.

HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has been largely silent on the firings that have come for his department. In a statement on Friday, department spokesperson Andrew Nixon blamed the firings on Democrats and said those who received notices were “non-essential.”

According to people familiar with the cuts, the firings included all the personnel in the CDC’s Washington, D.C., office. Some employees were terminated from the Office of Public Health Data, Surveillance and Technology; the Office of Human Resources; the office of the director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases; the Global Health Center; the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; the Office of Science, including people responsible for gathering information on global health threats; the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; and the CDC’s library.

Almost the entire staff behind the CDC's flagship publication, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, has been fired. The report is typically one of the first places where information about U.S. disease outbreaks is disseminated before appearing in other journals. It also runs long-form and supplemental writings on public health issues, including drug overdoses, infectious disease, and tobacco.

Also let go were most second-year members of the Epidemic Intelligence Service, the CDC's rapid outbreak response training program, as well as their laboratory counterparts, members of the Laboratory Leadership Service. A few people in those two programs who are in the U.S. Public Health Service were spared from the layoffs. Both programs appeared to be on the chopping block in the first round of reduction-in-force layoffs that the Trump administration leveled in February, but the threatened layoff notices were not issued then to EIS officers. Members of the laboratory leadership program were let go, but were later reinstated.

For the terminated CDC official, it's personal.

"I've dedicated over a decade to serving the public — through emergencies, pandemics, and everyday prevention work that saves lives quietly. To see the very system we've built being dismantled under false pretenses is devastating," the official continued. "It's not just the loss of a job or title; it's the erasure of trust, of continuity, of purpose. I know what public health can do when it's allowed to work. Watching it be taken apart like this feels like a betrayal of the American people we serve."

Another CDC employee who was "not among the illegally fired" said Saturday that witnessing the fate of others was "absolutely horrible."

"It's as emotionally devastating as it is dangerous to the American public," said the person, granted anonymity for fear of retribution.

The now-fired senior official said the people who guided teams through the Covid-19 pandemic, opioid crisis response, and chronic disease prevention now feel betrayed that they're being told their roles are non-essential.

“It’s a calculated blow meant to break the will of a workforce that has already given more than most Americans will ever see,” the official said.

The nation’s top health agency has weathered the ousting of Susan Monarez 29 days into her tenure as CDC director, only weeks after a gunman fired 500 bullets at the agency’s Atlanta headquarters, killing a police officer and shaking staff members facing unprecedented policy changes as well as fears about the politicization of public health. Just days after the shooting, the government fired over 150 violence and injury prevention specialists at the CDC Center for Injury Prevention. And the firings on Friday affected the Office of Safety, Security and Asset Management, which is responsible for agency security.

The CDC has also been targeted by Trump administration cuts since the start of the year. In April, reductions in force as part of White House efforts to shrink the federal governments saw the loss of 2,400 staff, or 18% of the agency.

The battle is not over, argued the fired CDC official, calling on Congress to use its authority to rein in the executive branch. Meanwhile, the official saluted colleagues who are resisting.

“This isn’t April 2025. People have learned. They’re organizing, sharing information, building networks across centers and regions. Federal scientists and staff understand what’s at stake, and they’re not going quietly,” the official said. “They’re fighting back — through lawful means, through solidarity, and through truth-telling. The era of silent dismantling is over.