



CDC in Georgia

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) first engaged with the country of Georgia in 1995 to assist in investigation of a large-scale diphtheria outbreak. In partnership with Georgia's National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) and government ministries, CDC strengthens capacity to detect and respond to disease outbreaks. CDC also strengthens laboratory, surveillance, and workforce capacities for COVID-19 response, hepatitis C virus elimination, and measles, rabies, and polio eradication.

CDC STAFF

- 1 U.S. Assignee
- 5 Locally Employed

AT A GLANCE

- Population: > 3 million
- Per capita income: \$14,160
- Life expectancy: F 78 / M 70 years
- Infant mortality rate: 8/1,000 live births

Sources:
World Bank 2020, Georgia
Population Reference Bureau 2021, Georgia

TOP 10 CAUSES OF DEATH

1. Ischemic heart disease
2. Stroke
3. Hypertensive heart disease
4. Lung cancer
5. Alzheimer's disease
6. Cirrhosis
7. Diabetes
8. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
9. Breast cancer
10. Stomach cancer

Source:
GBD Compare 2019, Georgia



COVID-19

The first case of COVID-19 in Georgia was reported on February 26, 2020. Existing collaborations between CDC and Georgia partners were critical to leveraging the molecular diagnostic infrastructure for hepatitis C, expert workforce, and quality assurance programs for SARS-CoV-2 testing. In March 2021, CDC supported the establishment of SARS-CoV-2 sequencing capacity to enhance national and global surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 variants. CDC collaborates on key COVID-19 preparedness and response activities including:

- Establishment of Georgia's Emergency Operations Center
- Integration of COVID-19 into existing disease surveillance platforms
- Population-based SARS-CoV-2 seroprevalence surveys

Global Health Security

Georgia's focus on health security began when the country volunteered to pilot an early version of the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) Joint External Evaluation (JEE) tool. In 2021, CDC joined Georgia as co-lead of the GHSA Real-Time Surveillance Action Package. CDC and NCDC support GHSA research and projects including:

- Strengthening the national laboratory system
- Enhancing real-time disease surveillance
- Supporting genomic research of the hepatitis C virus
- Assisting in outbreak investigations of zoonotic, foodborne, and respiratory diseases
- Strengthening molecular detection of drug resistance mechanisms
- Strengthening capacity of the Emergency Operations Center

One Health

CDC works with partners in Georgia to approach disease from a One Health perspective, recognizing that the health of people is connected to the health of animals and the environment. CDC collaborates with Georgia's National Food Agency (NFA) and NCDC to increase laboratory disease surveillance and outbreak investigation, response, and control of zoonotic, food-borne, water-borne, and enteric diseases. CDC implements the One Health approach by working with partners to:

- Develop disease control guidelines
- Conduct educational training sessions for zoonotic disease prioritization and identification of pathogens
- Pilot the transition to whole-genome sequencing for enteric disease surveillance
- Establish multi-sector disease surveillance systems

Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP)

CDC supported the NCDC to launch the advanced Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in 2009 and Ukraine in 2015. FELTP-Advanced expanded on the traditional FETP to train scientists in epidemiology, veterinary epidemiology, and laboratory quality management systems. FETP and FELTP graduates from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine investigate disease outbreaks and help their countries adopt disease control measures. FELTP-Advanced graduates mentored FETP-Frontline participants before the course was transitioned over to the NCDC in 2020.

Laboratory Systems Strengthening

CDC collaborates with Georgia's NCDC to increase laboratory and workforce capacity in quality management systems, project management, and disease surveillance. In 2018, CDC helped establish the Lugar Center's External Quality Assurance (EQA) program. CDC collaborates with the Lugar Center on proficiency testing and educational webinars on basic microbiology, laboratory testing, and bacteria isolation methods. CDC also supported Georgia to become the first country to implement a national Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). The LIMS connects human and animal health with food safety and environmental health to rapidly identify and contain disease outbreaks across the country. Georgia's laboratories and LIMS are critical assets to the country's GHSA goals, One Health approach, and outbreak response.

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

AMR and healthcare associated infections (HAIs) impact the quality of healthcare worldwide, increase morbidity and mortality, and lengthen hospital stays. In a recent national estimate, CDC found that compared to non-HAI cases, HAIs cost twice as much to treat. People with HAIs are also twice as likely to die. Since 2014, CDC also supports partners in Georgia to:

- Achieve laboratory accreditation
- Establish EQA and proficiency testing programs
- Conduct IPC assessments of healthcare facilities
- Monitor AMR patterns of enteric pathogens

Hepatitis C

In 2015, with CDC support, Georgia launched the world's first national viral hepatitis elimination program. The program offers free testing and treatment to all citizens and is a global model for hepatitis elimination. Georgia's hepatitis C virus (HCV) elimination program received CDC's Honor Award for Excellence in Partnering in 2021. Georgia was also selected to pilot the World Health Organization's Interim Guidance for Country Validation of Hepatitis Elimination.

- CDC supported the Blood Safety Program by implementing nationwide nucleic acid testing on all blood donations
- Nationwide serosurveys show that the proportion of the population with chronic HCV infections decreased from 5.4% in 2015 to 1.8% in 2021

Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

CDC, World Health Organization, and Georgian institutions have been immunization partners since the 1990s when CDC helped implement an immunization campaign to control a diphtheria outbreak. To achieve measles and rubella elimination in Georgia, CDC assists in analysis of epidemiologic data, surveillance reviews, immunization program reviews, and supplementary immunization activities. CDC continues to work to ensure Georgia remains polio-free.

CDC IMPACT IN GEORGIA



In 2021, CDC supported establishment of External Quality Assurance (EQA) programs for COVID-19 diagnostic testing in 60 laboratories across Georgia



As of December 2021, Georgia sequenced >900,000 COVID-19 cases and shared >700 SARS-CoV-2 sequences with the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID)



CDC proposed Infection Prevention Control (IPC) protocols that were adopted by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Social Affairs



In 2020 and 2021, CDC partnered with the NCDC to establish and conduct trainings on a specimen referral system for identification and referral of *Campylobacter*



CDC helped establish the Pulse-field Gel Electrophoresis testing method for enteric pathogens in 2019



The Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) Alumni Association was founded in 2019 and is a crucial asset for the public health system



In 2021, CDC helped launch a regional FETP-Intermediate course that includes 21 residents from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine



CDC supported the development of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) IPC guidelines that will be incorporated in the 2022 National IPC Program



In partnership with the American Society of Microbiology, CDC delivered 10 webinar trainings, developed 7 protocols and standard operating procedures for the Lugar Center and 23 national AMR laboratories in 2021



As of 2021, over 2 million people have been screened for hepatitis C virus (HCV), 95,000 people with chronic HCV infections have been identified, and 76,000 people have been treated



CDC helped develop the 2016-2021 and 2021-2025 Strategic Plan for the Elimination of Hepatitis in Georgia

For more country information, visit:
www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/georgia

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