

U.S. Confirms Its First Human Case of New World Screwworm

U.S. health officials confirmed the first travel-related human case of New World screwworm (NWS) in decades. The infestation was identified in a Maryland resident who had recently traveled to El Salvador, a country currently experiencing screwworm outbreaks in its livestock.

Key highlights

- **Case confirmation:** The case of myiasis, or parasitic fly larvae infestation, was confirmed on August 4, 2025, after laboratory identification by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- **Patient status:** The infected person has since recovered, and authorities have confirmed there was no transmission to other people or animals in the U.S..
- **Public health risk:** The risk to the general public remains very low, according to the Maryland Department of Health.

What is the New World screwworm?

- **Name:** The parasite's scientific name is *Cochliomyia hominivorax*, which literally means "man-eater".
- **Nature:** NWS is a type of blowfly whose larvae burrow into the living tissue of warm-blooded animals, including livestock, pets, and, rarely, humans.
- **Infestation:** Female flies lay eggs in or around open wounds. Once the eggs hatch, the maggots use sharp hooks to burrow deeper and feed on the living flesh, which can cause extreme pain and tissue destruction. If left untreated, the infestation can be fatal.

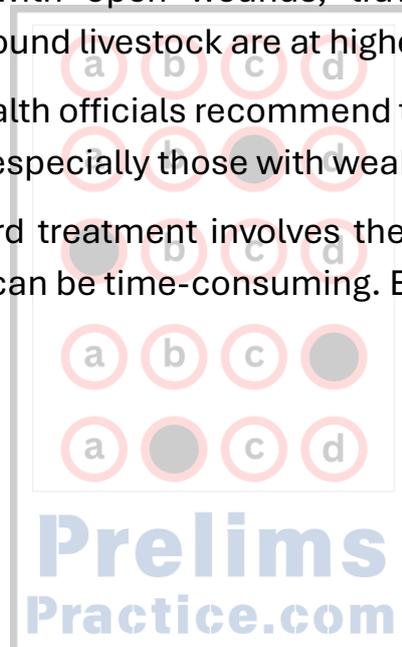
Wider context and containment efforts

- **Origin of outbreak:** The current outbreak affecting Central America began in Panama in 2023 before spreading northward through Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and eventually into Mexico. El Salvador is one of the affected nations.
- **Historical eradication:** The NWS was eradicated from the U.S. in the 1960s and held back at the Panama-Colombia border for decades using the "sterile insect technique" (SIT), which involves releasing millions of lab-reared, sterile male flies to mate with wild females.

- **Recent re-emergence:** A previous outbreak occurred in the Florida Keys in 2016 and was also eliminated using the SIT. However, the current northward spread of the parasite has re-ignited concerns, particularly for the U.S. livestock industry.
- **Border concerns:** In September 2025, news emerged that screwworms had been detected in Mexico less than 70 miles from the Texas border, leading to new U.S. containment measures and renewed investment in sterile fly production facilities in Texas and Mexico.

Symptoms and precautions

- **Symptoms:** Signs of infestation include painful and non-healing sores, foul-smelling discharge, and, in some cases, the visible movement of maggots.
- **Risk factors:** People with open wounds, travelers to outbreak areas, and individuals who work around livestock are at higher risk.
- **Travel precautions:** Health officials recommend that travelers to affected regions take extra precautions, especially those with weakened immune systems.
- **Treatment:** The standard treatment involves the physical removal of the larvae from the wound, which can be time-consuming. Early detection is crucial.



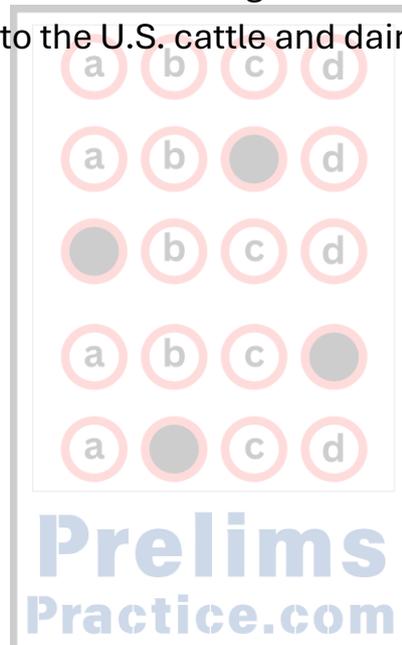
Practice Questions:

1. The recent outbreak of New World Screwworm affecting the U.S. is most likely linked to which factor?

- a) Climate change leading to an increase in blowfly populations
- b) The movement of infested cattle across regions
- c) Global trade routes for meat products
- d) Accidental release of laboratory-bred flies

Answer: b

Explanation: The spread of the screwworm parasite is often linked to the movement of infested livestock, with recent outbreaks being detected in Central American countries. This poses a significant threat to the U.S. cattle and dairy industry.



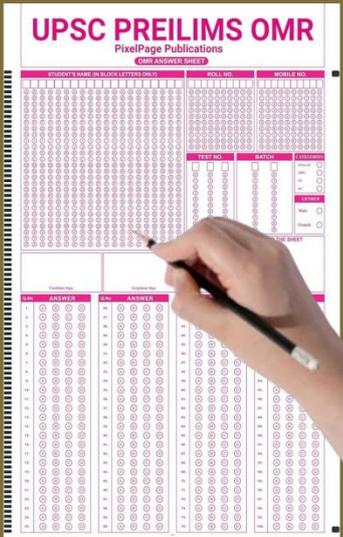
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