

ICE Is a Death Machine

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On Oct. 8 in New York City, an ICE officer in street clothes approached a stopped car with his gun drawn. When the driver began to pull forward, officers [opened fire](#) on the vehicle. Inside were 28-year-old Oscar Belgal and his five-year-old son. One of the rounds struck Belgal in the neck. He survived, and ICE took him into custody.

Two days later, on Oct. 10, footage from a Houston shopping center showed an unmarked ICE vehicle veering across a parking lot in pursuit of Miguel Parra-Hernandez, a 48-year-old Mexican man who was fleeing on foot. The vehicle ran him down, leaving him with fractures requiring multiple surgeries. He wasn't even the man ICE was looking for; Parra-Hernandez's family says he has lived in the United States for nearly 30 years and was on his way to work. The local district attorney believes the agent [hit](#) Parra-Hernandez intentionally, but the agent [drove](#) the vehicle away before its crash data could be examined.

Scenes like these—carried out in broad daylight by armed agents who wear everyday clothes, operate unmarked vehicles, and answer to no local authority—rightly provoke widespread outrage. Far less attention is given to the deaths that happen *inside* ICE detention facilities, where nobody is filming and where the administration has worked hard to keep watchdogs out.

In March 2025, DHS [shut down](#) the two internal offices that investigated detention complaints. It has also repeatedly turned away members of Congress who showed up at ICE facilities for unannounced inspections, even though federal law prohibits DHS from blocking such visits. (When DHS began requiring a week’s notice—which obviously defeats the purpose of a surprise inspection—a federal judge blocked that rule. DHS then quietly [reinstated](#) it in a private memo, and the court blocked it again.)

Deaths in ICE custody are now at their highest level in more than [two decades](#). In 2025, at least 32 people [died in ICE custody](#), and 2026 is on pace to surpass that, with more than two dozen deaths by mid-September. One of the most recent was Julian Curo-Churata, a 47-year-old Peruvian man who had lived in Maryland for 17 years. He [died](#) on Sept. 29 after ICE found him “in medical distress” at a Louisiana facility. This spike is not simply a byproduct of ICE holding more people. One report [found](#) that the mortality rate in ICE detention—deaths per 10,000 people held on an average day—has more than doubled since Trump’s second term began. An [investigation](#) by the *San Francisco Chronicle* found that 17 of the 32 deaths whose case files it reviewed were the result of delayed or inadequate medical care.

Even these figures are almost certainly an undercount because ICE has [changed](#) how it records detainee deaths. In 2021, the Biden administration began requiring ICE to report deaths that occurred within 30 days of a detainee’s release. In [June](#), Trump’s DHS scrapped that rule, and ICE now reports only deaths that occur while someone is in its custody. That means ICE can release severely ill detainees—including those whose illness was caused or exacerbated by detention—shortly before they die and keep those deaths off its books.

There are known cases when ICE has used this tactic. Jose Chajon-Raxon, a Guatemalan immigrant in New Jersey, [had a seizure](#) the day after being arrested by ICE. He was taken to a hospital, and after three days ICE released him from custody. He later died, but ICE never disclosed it; his death [came to light](#) only weeks later. Rep. Rob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, [accused](#) ICE of trying to “wash their hands clean.” Chajon-Raxon was the third death linked to Delaney Hall, an ICE detention center in Newark, where 300 detainees [signed a letter](#) alleging that the seriously ill were being denied proper medical care.

Nor do the official figures capture miscarriages. ICE is detaining a [record number of pregnant women](#), and it logged 18 miscarriages in the first nine months of Trump’s second term. Then it [stopped counting](#). After ICE ended its contract with the Veterans Affairs office that handled its medical billing, DHS said it “does not have data on miscarriages from October 2025 through June 2026.”

None of this has slowed the administration’s push to expand detention and put even more lives at risk. The [ACLU reports](#) that ICE is converting shuttered federal prisons and leasing warehouse space nationwide, aiming to hold 96,600 people at any given time, up from a [record 73,000](#) in January.

This will almost certainly lead to more deaths in ICE facilities. These deaths fall into three broad categories.

Deaths from Inhumane Conditions

There is [ample evidence](#) of inhumane conditions in ICE detention facilities leading to deaths. An [investigative report](#) from the office of Sen. Jon Ossoff, a Georgia Democrat, documented over 1,000 credible reports of human rights violations during the first year of Trump’s second term, including mistreatment of

children and pregnant women, sleep deprivation, physical and sexual abuse, inadequate food and water, overcrowding, and exposure to extreme temperatures. Before Florida's "[Alligator Alcatraz](#)" closed in June, the DHS inspector general made an unannounced [inspection](#). Its report, released months after its closure, found that the facility [failed to comply](#) with national standards for medical care, food service, and hygiene, among other violations. At least on one occasion staff held detainees in [cages](#) of about 18 square feet, roughly the size of a phone booth, as punishment.

Poor conditions can contribute to rising fatality rates in at least two ways: by creating or exacerbating illnesses that would not have occurred in appropriate conditions, and by contributing to detainee suicides.

At least 10 detainees died by suicide between January 2025 and May 2026, a dramatic [spike](#) for an agency that typically recorded one or none per year. An Associated Press [investigation](#) found delayed or refused mental health care and inadequate monitoring of detainees. Detainees at Camp East Montana, which is part of the Fort Bliss Army base in El Paso and is the nation's largest detention facility, have [said](#) that squalid conditions and brutal treatment led them to consider suicide. The ACLU is [suing](#) over what it calls "a civil rights catastrophe" at the camp.

The [tragic case](#) of Brayan Rayo-Garzon, a Colombian military veteran whose death was the first in a spike of detainee suicides, shows how these failures compound. At the Missouri county jail where ICE held him, his initial medical screening took 35 hours. His mental health appointment was canceled twice: first for lack of "mental health clinic time and staff," then because he had COVID. Moved into an isolation cell, he slid notes under the door asking to call his mother. "I know you have family, and you know that they worry about us," he wrote to the guards. "God bless you." He never got the appointment or the call. Within an hour of a guard collecting one of his notes, he was found unconscious in his cell. He died at a hospital in April 2025.

Detention conditions are also spreading disease. ICE returned a detainee with tuberculosis to Delaney Hall without a plan to contain the infection, [according to a physician](#). *The New York Times* [reports](#) unsafe meals, unsanitary food preparation workspaces, and dirty and overcrowded living spaces at that facility. [Several](#) other facilities have had [outbreaks](#) of tuberculosis. Camp East Montana suffered a [measles](#) outbreak that forced 112 detainees to be isolated.

As ICE packs more people into detention and [general healthcare conditions](#) worsen, expect more illness and more deaths.

Deaths from Withheld or Delayed Treatment

Consider the case of Fernando Viera Reyes, a 50-year-old man currently being held at the largest immigration detention center in California. He had tests taken during an earlier detention that revealed signs of prostate cancer—but when he asked for pain medication, a doctor [prescribed vitamin C](#) and staff told him to buy himself some Tylenol. It took [five months](#) to get him a biopsy. Viera Reyes recounted his experience: "For months, I couldn't move, sleep, or even use the bathroom without being in extreme pain. It wasn't until we filed this class action lawsuit and had a court order that staff at California City finally got me to a specialist." When the diagnosis finally came, it was metastatic prostate cancer, meaning it had already spread beyond the prostate. Prostate cancer is curable when caught early, but much less so after it has

metastasized, as it has in Viera Reyes's case. Other detainees likewise report being denied insulin and heart medication to manage chronic conditions. Earlier this year, a federal judge felt compelled to [order](#) the government to provide adequate medical care—but several months later, a court-appointed monitor found that ICE still wasn't complying.

ICE's own reviewers have reached similar conclusions. In late September, the agency posted internal reviews of 33 detainee deaths dating back to 2019, then [quietly pulled them](#). Of the 31 reviews that reached a conclusion, [27 found](#) that care had fallen outside "the safe limits of practice." In the case of Marie Ange Blaise, staff monitored her rather than performing CPR, "despite Ms. Blaise's pulselessness."

Emmanuel Damas, a Haitian man who came to the U.S. [legally](#) during the Biden administration, was taken into ICE custody in September 2025. Months later, he died of a severe tooth infection that a medical examiner's report stated came from dental cavities and untreated tooth disease. He reported a severe toothache but his brother [says](#) ICE did not take Damas' complaints seriously.

Carlos Josué Marchena-Marchena, from Costa Rica, [repeatedly complained](#) of missing insulin shots and meals, as well as insufficient water, to manage his Type 1 diabetes. He died last month.

Ismael Ayala-Urbe, 39, was brought to the United States when he was four years old. ICE took him into custody in August 2025. His requests for treatment of a painful abscess were [ignored for days](#), and by the time he was admitted for sepsis, it was too late. He died the following month. Weeks before he arrived at California's Adelanto ICE Processing Center, ICE had [waived](#) the facility's requirement that detainees receive a full health assessment within 14 days. An internal ICE review later found that his care "deviated beyond safe limits of practice."

Homicide Deaths

One death in ICE custody has been ruled a homicide: Geraldo Lunas Campos, a 55-year-old Cuban migrant being held in Camp East Montana, died in January 2026. A fellow detainee [reported](#) that Lunas Campos was already handcuffed when at least five guards pinned him to the floor and one put him in a chokehold until he lost consciousness. "The last thing he said was that he couldn't breathe," according to the witness. ICE initially reported that Lunas Campos died after "[experiencing medical distress](#)," then [changed its story](#) to attempted suicide. The autopsy report classified his death as homicide from asphyxiation to "[neck and torso compression](#)."

Families of other detainees have raised questions about the circumstances of their deaths. Chaofeng Ge, a 32-year-old Chinese citizen and a resident of New York City, was found hanging in August 2025 and the death was ruled a suicide. But his autopsy found that his hands and feet were "[hog-tied](#)." The autopsy also noted signs of defensive trauma, and an internal ICE review found that staff delayed life-saving measures by about five minutes after finding him. His family has filed a FOIA [lawsuit](#) seeking further information on his death and the conditions of his detention.

Victor Manuel Diaz, who was also being held in Camp East Montana, was also declared a "presumed suicide" by ICE. But rather than send Diaz's body to the El Paso County medical examiner, which ruled

Lunas Campos' death a homicide, ICE snuck it to a [military hospital](#) that does not publicly release autopsy results. The family wasn't told about the transfer; by the time their attorney [tracked down the body](#), the autopsy had already been performed. The family learned of ICE's suicide finding [from the news](#). Diaz's family members say they [do not believe](#) Diaz took his own life, and their attorney is [seeking answers](#).



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