

Third case of monkeypox confirmed by Georgia Department of Public Health

The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) confirmed a third case of monkeypox in the state Friday.

An Atlanta man who recently traveled to Chicago for a convention has been diagnosed with the disease, DPH spokeswoman Nancy Nydam said. The man's case is unrelated to the previous two cases identified in the state.

The man is isolating and contact tracing has started, Nydam added.

The first suspected monkeypox case in Georgia was identified on June 1. The DPH noted a second case earlier this week at its monthly board meeting.

Monkeypox is a viral disease that causes the skin to break out in pustules. It was first detected in laboratory monkeys and then discovered in humans in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The disease is usually mild but can be life threatening in some cases.

The current outbreak is unusual because 1,285 cases have confirmed in 28 countries where the disease is not typi-

cally found. The disease is considered endemic to certain central and western African areas.

Most of the cases in the current outbreak have been identified in the United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal.

So far, the CDC has identified 100 cases in 20 states and Washington, D.C.

The cases in the current outbreak appear to have been transmitted through very close personal contact with someone else who had the lesions, state epidemiologist Cherie Drenzek said at a Board of Public Health meeting this week.

Often, the monkeypox infections have been found in people also infected with chlamydia, HPV, or syphilis, and many of the people with the disease identify themselves as men who have sex with men, Drenzek said.

People diagnosed with monkeypox in the current outbreak are not reporting the initial fever and gland swelling usually experienced at the start of the infection.

The rash also differs from that

seen in typical monkeypox cases, with fewer lesions that are less pronounced than those usually seen. In the current outbreak, the rash often begins in the genital and perianal region and tends to progress more rapidly than in usual cases, Drenzek said.

There are currently no monkeypox-specific treatments, but medicines developed to treat smallpox can be helpful. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved two vaccines for monkeypox, according to the CDC.

"Anyone with a rash that looks like monkeypox should talk to their healthcare provider, even if they don't think they had contact with someone who has monkeypox," the CDC advises. "The threat of monkeypox to the general U.S. population remains low."

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Co-responder program aims to stop the flow of mentally ill into jails

A new law championed by Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan taking effect July 1 is expected to boost efforts to reduce the number of mentally ill Georgians landing in jail cells.

Local law enforcement agencies are increasingly turning to "co-responder" programs to deal with the number of mental health-related emergency calls. When a call comes in, mental health experts are sent out with police officers to help people suffering from mental illness or substance abuse.

About 40% of calls to law enforcement agencies are related to mental health, several police chiefs said in recent interviews.

Though statewide data is difficult to find, at least seven departments have established such programs. DeKalb County's program has been around since the 1990s, while Albany started a new program just weeks ago.

Brookhaven, Gainesville, Forsyth County, LaGrange, Athens-Clarke County, and Savannah also have co-responder programs.

Senate Bill 403 requires community service boards (CSBs) to establish a co-responder program that will provide consultations to law enforcement officers responding to people with behavioral health problems. There are 22 such CSBs across the state providing behavioral health services to Georgia communities.

The law also clarifies that mental health professionals can advise law enforcement agents on whether the person needs immediate emergency treatment or subsequent referral to services instead of arrest.

And CSB mental health staffers can look at arrest records and recommend that people in jail be provided with behavioral health treatment instead of remaining in the criminal justice system.

Duncan said he was inspired by a program in Forsyth County, where he lives.

There, the sheriff's office teamed

up with the local community service board, Avita Community Partners, to help stem the tide of mentally ill people in the criminal justice system.

The Forsyth team includes three members: a police officer, a licensed clinical social worker, and a peer specialist. The police officer and licensed clinical social worker respond directly to police calls to help people on the spot.

"Examples ... have included simply talking with people until emotional distress has subsided, setting up crisis plans with individuals and their families, setting up appointments with care providers, and occasionally involuntary commitment for an emergency examination," said Stacie Miller, public information officer for the sheriff's office.

Hundreds of miles away, Albany started a similar program just a few weeks ago.

The Albany program sends a peer co-responder out on calls with a mental health clinician and police officer. The peer co-responder has personal experience with mental health issues, substance abuse, and incarceration and helps the person in crisis get follow-up care.

"Their main goal really is to prevent individuals from having to be both hospitalized and/or incarcerated," said Lisa Oosterveen, deputy director at Aspire Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Services and a moving force behind the new program.

Albany Chief of Police Michael Persley said even though his department is short-staffed, he thought it was well worth the investment to provide an officer to focus on mental health calls.

"You're either gonna pay now or pay later," he said. "And the pay later can come in the form of an incident that turns fatal. ... There's too many examples where people say, 'Hey, this person, I needed the police to help, but I didn't want the police to kill [them].'"

The Forsyth County program saw a 25% decrease in the number of people

suffering from mental illness booked into the county jail in the first year of the program.

But success is more often measured in individual stories and community feedback than cold, hard numbers.

"I cannot tell you how many family members have thanked us, with tears in their eyes, because we helped calm an inflamed situation or helped a loved one in crisis get to a hospital for stabilization," said Sgt. Terry Hawkins, the team leader in the sheriff's office.

Hawkins said other law enforcement officers also are grateful because his dedicated mental health team lets them focus on their core law enforcement duties.

However, the needs of people with behavioral health issues face are complex, and Georgia communities frequently lack the full complement of resources needed to achieve sustainable progress.

Much wider changes are needed, said LaGrange Chief of Police Louis Dekmar, who also sits on the state's Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission and is a past president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

"There's no resources that really reflect a commitment to really help these people," Dekmar said.

"If you're judged by how you treat the least among us, which are children and our elderly and our folks that are affected by mental illness ... I'm afraid in all three areas we as a society don't rate very high."

Still, the co-responder programs are a step toward fixing a much larger problem and preventing the criminalization of mental illness.

Gainesville Chief of Police Jay Parrish described his department's successes with its two-year-old program as a series of small victories.

"It's not about how many we save but the ones we do save," Parrish said. "Any program is better than no program."

Georgia teachers running on empty, according to new report

Georgia teachers are struggling to cope with the impacts of the pandemic on education to the point that many are likely to leave teaching, according to a new report from the Georgia Department of Education.

"The teachers I know don't want to walk away ... but too many teachers I know are running on empty," Cherie Bonder Goldman, the 2022 Georgia Teacher of the Year, wrote at the start of the report.

The task force behind the report conducted focus groups with teachers across Georgia last Winter.

About a third of educators said they were unlikely to remain in the profession for the next five years, according to a survey cited in the report.

Georgia should reduce the emphasis on test scores as a marker of teacher success, the new report contends.

"There were so many tests from every angle, district and state required, that the students were numb," said one middle school science teacher quoted in the report. "These scores fall on us."

"The unspoken message that if a student isn't successful then it's the teacher's fault needs to go away," an elementary school teacher added. "There are so many factors outside of a teacher's control that impact student achievement."

Georgia recently received permission from the federal Department of Education to collect less data on school performance for the third year in a row.

Teachers also need time and support

to help their students return to pre-pandemic levels of engagement and performance, the report contends.

"Coming out of the pandemic, the desire to 'return to normal' has also come with an unrealistic expectation ... without giving teachers the time, support, resources, and compassion to meet students at their current level," the report notes.

The state Department of Education recently said it would use 2022 data, rather than pre-pandemic data, to evaluate school improvement going forward.

Class sizes should be reduced so teachers can "meet the individual needs of students," the report says.

The report also recommends hiring additional school support staff, including counselors and psychologists, school nurses, and paraprofessionals.

School systems should streamline paperwork and reduce unnecessary meetings so teachers have more time to focus on teaching, the report states.

"The workload is nearly impossible to tackle during the hours we are actually at the school," said an elementary school teacher. "So many of us have to 'volunteer' our time simply to do what is required of us."

Gov. Brian Kemp and the General Assembly gave teachers a \$3,000 pay raise in 2019 and provided another \$2,000 this year. Teachers and support staff also received bonuses totaling \$3,000 during the pandemic.

But teachers still need more pay if they are to battle burnout and remain in the profession, the report contends.

Georgia should "fund step raises at every stage of a teacher's career" to encourage teachers to stay in the profession. The state should also protect teacher health-care and retirement benefits, according to the report.

"Teachers always seem to go above and beyond their call of teaching but are hardly compensated or acknowledged for their efforts," one high school math teacher told the task force.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams recently said she would revise the teacher pay scale so that all teachers make at least \$50,000 a year. Her revised pay scale would increase teacher pay across the board.

Those who are making decisions about what teachers do should either be teachers themselves or have significant recent classroom experience, the report states.

"So many decisions are made regarding what should be happening in a classroom by people who are no longer in a classroom and have been out for a long time, or by people who have never been in a classroom," one elementary teacher quoted in the report states.

Finally, like all other Georgia workers, teachers need mental health support and work-life balance.

"Recognize that teachers are people ... and treat them accordingly," the report recommends.

Financial Focus

How should you respond to a bear market?

So far, 2022 has not been a good year for investors. In fact, we're moving into bear market territory. What should you know about bear markets? And how should you respond?

To begin with, a bear market occurs when a stock market index, such as the S&P 500, falls at least 20% from its most recent high point. You might think this type of drop is rare, but that's not actually the case. Historically, bear markets have occurred every few years and are a normal feature of the investment landscape. We experienced a bear market fairly recently, from mid-February 2020 through late March of that same year.

What causes bear markets? Each one is different, but the current one is largely the result of several factors, including high inflation, rising interest rates, the war in Ukraine and global supply chain problems.



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When will the financial markets again start moving in a positive direction? No one can say for sure, but in any case, it's not really a good idea to make investment decisions based on what may happen next in the financial markets. Instead, consider these moves:

- **Be patient.** It can be challenging to look at your investment statements during these days. But you'll help yourself by taking a long-term view. Consider this: From March 2009 until the end of 2021, the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained more than 460%. So, if you've been investing for a while, compare where you are now to where you were 10 or 12 years ago. You've probably made pretty good progress over this time – and 10 years from now, the current downturn may not look like such a big event, either.

- **Review your risk tolerance.** If you're having a hard time coping with investment losses – even if they're just "paper losses" for now – you may want to review your tolerance for risk and see if it's still the same as it was when you began investing. Even without a bear market, people's risk tolerance can change, especially as they approach retirement.

- **Review your goals.** A bear market is not meaningless, but by itself, it shouldn't cause you to change your long-term goals. And if your goals haven't changed, neither should your investment strategy.

- **Look for buying opportunities.** During a down market, you can find quality investments at attractive prices. So, you could take this opportunity to fill gaps in your portfolio or add shares of investments that you already own and that you believe have good prospects for growth.

- **Get some help.** When trying to navigate a lengthy market downturn, it can be useful to get some support and guidance. Consider this: Among investors who work with a financial advisor, 84% said that doing so gave them a greater sense of comfort about their finances during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a survey conducted in 2020 by Age Wave and Edward Jones. And getting professional help may provide the same type of reassurance during the current market turmoil.

A bear market is never enjoyable. But taking the long view and making moves appropriate for your needs can help you get through this period and look ahead to better days.

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