

Reports expose Trump administration's "Border Patrol to emergency room" pipeline

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Thousands of people arrested by the US Border Patrol crossing the US-Mexico border are released from detention centers only to go directly to the emergency rooms of local hospitals, according to two damning press reports issued this past week.

The *Atlantic* magazine reported Sunday on what it termed "The Border Patrol-to-Emergency Room Pipeline," describing immigrants, frequently exhausted, dehydrated or otherwise weakened by crossing the border in remote desert areas, then thrown into detention centers where they can't wash their hands, even after using the bathroom, and are frequently denied clean drinking water and hot food.

A local pediatrician who visited a McAllen, Texas, detention center, Dolly Lucio Sevier, wrote a scathing report on the conditions there last month, calling them "tantamount to intentionally causing the spread of disease." This is a tactic that harks back to the genocidal treatment of Native Americans in the 18th century, when deadly diseases like smallpox were deliberately spread among them through the distribution of infected blankets.

According to the *Atlantic*, "Emergency-room doctors and nurses in the Rio Grande Valley, the busiest border region for migrant crossings, say they often see detained immigrants escorted into their offices by immigration agents. A physician's assistant ... said that in her regular 12-hour shifts she usually sees between five and 10 patients escorted by Border Patrol agents for issues such as medication refills, the flu, chicken pox, anxiety, pink eye, and bone fractures from jumping off the border wall.

"Carlos Ramirez, the medical director of a freestanding emergency room run by Rio Grande Regional Hospital, said he regularly sees patients recently released from Border Patrol with advanced

coughs, congestion, lung infections, stomach problems, and skin conditions."

A July 16 report in the non-profit *Texas Tribune* found, "Cases of severe dehydration and overexertion among migrants are skyrocketing in deep South Texas as people push their bodies past the breaking point to get into the United States, new statistics obtained by the *Texas Tribune* show."

The report, citing local Border Patrol chief Rodolfo Karisch, found that agents are taking 30 migrants per day to the emergency room just in the Rio Grande Valley Sector. Multiplied across the other sectors of the US-Mexico border, that would add up to thousands of migrants a month going from detention centers to emergency rooms.

Karisch has set aside an entire Border Patrol station, in Weslaco, to be used as an infirmary to quarantine patients with infectious diseases. The *Tribune* report cites one disease in particular:

"According to figures compiled by the U.S. Border Patrol's Rio Grande Valley Sector, which has the most apprehensions on the U.S.-Mexico border, authorities have already encountered 64 migrants with a rare and dangerous condition known as rhabdomyolysis so far in the 2019 fiscal year. That's double last year's total—and there are still more than two months left in the period."

Rhabdomyolysis is a potentially life-threatening condition, in which overexertion and dehydration break down muscle tissue, releasing myoglobin into the bloodstream, which clogs the kidneys and can cause renal failure.

A nurse at a Rio Grande Valley hospital told the *Tribune* that migrants may be sick when they are detained, but they get worse because of being detained with other sick migrants in unsanitary conditions for a

prolonged period. “They’re arriving here sick, and they get sicker,” she said.

The *Tribune* report continued:

“The nurse said young migrants going through the intake process had conditions that included diaper rash so bad that babies were bleeding, explosive diarrhea that oozes out of days-old diapers, chicken pox, antibiotic-resistant infections, multiple viral infections and at least one hungry baby who guzzled four bottles of formula.”

These press accounts—a rare exception in the American media—give a glimpse of the brutal conditions deliberately created by the Trump administration in its effort to block the flow of desperate and cruelly oppressed people from Central America, fleeing police dictatorships and drug gangs and seeking sanctuary in the United States.

This brutality is what the congressional Democrats voted to fund last month when they approved Trump’s demand for \$4.6 billion in additional spending on the border concentration camps.

The horrific conditions in the camps continue to spark opposition from those imprisoned in them. A group of South Asian asylum seekers held at the Otero County Processing Center, in southern New Mexico near El Paso, Texas, have gone on hunger strike. It is the second group of asylum seekers from India, most of them Sikhs, who have gone on hunger strike at Otero.

According to an inspection report on the Otero facility, which is run by the for-profit company MTC, there were 93 hunger strikes there in 2018.

Both groups of hunger strikers this year have been transferred from Otero to the El Paso Processing Center, a facility run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The first group was subjected to force-feeding, which is extremely painful. Two of the nine defied the force-feeding and continued their protest for 74 days.

Besides imprisonment, neglect, and infliction of what amounts to deliberate infection of detainees with disease, the Border Patrol continues to engage in outright violence against migrants. Agents fired tear gas and pepper spray early Friday on the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, a major border crossing between Texas and the Mexican state of Tamaulipas.

About 50 “undocumented individuals” tried to cross the bridge about 4 a.m., during the time that it is closed

to traffic. They climbed over the temporary barriers set up during the overnight period and tried to keep going after Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers and state and local police confronted them. The US officers and police used tear gas and pepper spray, and Mexican authorities intervened from the other side of the bridge to remove most of the would-be migrants.

The Trump administration is pressing for far more drastic and aggressive action by the Mexican government against migrants, both on the southern border with Guatemala, on the northern border with the United States, and within the country.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived in Mexico City Sunday to meet with Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard to discuss migration and trade. The Trump administration has deliberately linked the two issues, threatening to impose punitive tariffs on Mexican products going to the US market unless the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador carries out drastic attacks on Central American migrants by Monday, July 22.



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