

New Clinical Trials at Leading HIV Center Paused Over Funding Probe

“I worry for my patients,” says a researcher at the Chicago CORE center. The pause also affects trials for cancer, COVID and mpox.

January 12, 2023 By [Trent Straube](#)

New clinical trials at a prominent [HIV](#) research center in Chicago have been halted for the past nine months, but funding for ongoing studies is in jeopardy and researchers may be laid off as soon as this week as Cook County Health officials continue to investigate a nonprofit that manages the finances of grant-funded research, [reports the Chicago Sun Times](#). The pause also affects new trials for [COVID-19](#), [mpox](#) and [cancer](#) at the Ruth M. Rothstein CORE Center.

“This is a disaster,” HIV activist Jim Pickett, who has worked with the research center for nearly three decades, told the newspaper. “This is one of the three or four main sites for this kind of research in the country, and they can’t move forward. To replace that is no small matter.”

Indeed, the CORE Center is “one of the largest HIV/AIDS clinics in the U.S. specializing in prevention, care and research of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases,” [according to Cook County Health](#). Launched in 1998, the CORE Center is a partnership between Cook County Hospital and Rush University Medical Center.

Cook County Health officials are investigating the Hektoen Institute for Medical Research, a nonprofit founded in 1940 by county physicians that has managed the county’s medical research grants.

The investigation was launched, according to a statement quoted in the Sun Times, “to ensure that all trials are in compliance with applicable regulations. [Cook County Health] has engaged an impartial firm to review recent trial activity, including compliance with financial and clinical research standards. The investigation is actively underway. In the interim, CCH has temporarily paused engaging in new clinical trials.”

County officials said the funding pause, which was initiated in April, only affected new clinical trials, not ongoing research, reports the newspaper. But workers at the CORE Center pointed out that if they get laid off, no one would be able to continue the trials already in process.

“I am concerned about the research, and I’m concerned about my job, but really, I worry for my

patients,” added a researcher on a list for layoffs. “Over the course of a clinical trial that lasts months or years, you really get to know them and their stories, and many of them really need this kind of care that they can’t get, sometimes literally, anywhere else.”

One researcher told the newspaper that staff working on research projects at the CORE Center have not been interviewed by investigators.

If county health officials had uncovered anything that put clients’ health at risk, Pickett added, then the authorities would have been notified.

In related news, check out the [POZ Basics on HIV Clinical Trials](#), which explains how experiments are set up to test possible new treatments as they move toward approval by the Food and Drug Administration. The Basics also explores why people living with HIV or other illnesses may benefit from participating in clinical trials.

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