

METRO ATLANTA

'It's terrifying': CDC employees speak about shooting, lingering fears

Employees call for resignation of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., more support from federal government.



A Centers for Disease Control employee writes a dedication to fallen DeKalb County police officer David Rose, 33, outside the CDC headquarters on Sunday, Aug. 10, 2025. "I came here to pay my respects to him and his family. He died protecting us. It is important to me to honor him," Foltom said. (Miguel Martinez/AJC)

By David Aaro
Updated Aug 11, 2025



Dr. Elizabeth Soda felt helpless as she frantically messaged her co-workers Friday once a gunman had opened fire on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The 40-year-old, who works at the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, had just left her CDC office 30 minutes before the shooting. Now her colleagues were stuck and barricaded inside.

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"There were lots of messages," she told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "You just never think it's gonna happen to you until it does."

While her co-workers ultimately made it home safely, she said fear still lingers two days after the shooting, which left responding DeKalb County police officer David Rose dead. Bullets struck the windows of her office on building 16, just feet from where she normally works. At least three other buildings at the Atlanta-based public health agency were hit by gunfire, officials said.

"It's terrifying," Soda told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "We're just here to work hard and save lives as best we can. We can't do that if we can't come to an office where we feel safe."



Dr. Elizabeth Soda, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention employee, speaks during a press conference Sunday, Aug. 10, 2025, at Piedmont Park in Atlanta. (David Aaro/AJC)

Soda was one of dozens of Atlantans, including past and present CDC employees, who attended a news conference Sunday in Piedmont Park to condemn the attack. Those in attendance spoke about the importance of the agency amid significant cuts by the federal government and scrutiny over vaccines under [Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#)

Many held up signs that read "CDC saves lives," "Save the CDC," and "Resign Stand Down RFK!!!!" The CDC is one of the largest employers in the state and had around 2,000 layoffs under Kennedy.

Peter Farruggia, a member of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 2883, a union representing workers at the CDC, said the shooting was "not random" and compounded "months of mistreatment, neglect and vilification that CDC staff have endured."

He added that vaccine misinformation "continues to be a dangerous threat to public health and public safety."

The shooter, identified by the FBI as Patrick Joseph White, was found dead on the second floor of a CVS across the street from the CDC. White [blamed the COVID-19 vaccine for making him depressed and suicidal](#), a law enforcement official told The Associated Press on Saturday.

White, who was armed with several firearms and at least one long gun, also tried to get into the CDC's headquarters in Atlanta but was stopped by guards, according to that report.

Soda declined to comment on White's motives, but stated that Kennedy was "propagating misinformation and distrust."

"He's full of quack theories. It's not science-driven. It's not what the American public deserves," said Soda, who has worked at the CDC since 2016. "The vaccine has saved so many lives."

Follow the AJC's coverage of the shooting at the CDC

A man opened fire on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday, [killing a police officer](#) who tried to stop him, authorities said. Check back with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution for the latest breaking news, updates and insights on the developing news.

Here is the latest to catch up on:

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Saturday, Kennedy's official social media account posted a message of support for CDC employees. A longer one was emailed to them directly.

"We know how deeply unsettling this is, particularly for those working in Atlanta," the statement said. "The shock and uncertainty that follow incidents like this are real, and they affect us all in different ways. We want everyone to know, you're not alone. Leadership is in close coordination with CDC teams to ensure support is available on the ground."



More than 50 people attend the rally in Atlanta's Piedmont Park on Sunday, Aug. 10, 2025, two days after a gunman opened fire at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (David Aaro/AJC)

Anna Yousaf, an infectious diseases physician at the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the CDC, said Kennedy needed to "take responsibility for his (previous) language" following the recent statement.

"(Kennedy) has likened the CDC to a Nazi death camp. He's told his followers that we are committing atrocities against children, and he needs to take ownership of that language, denounce it and tell his followers that those statements are untrue," Yousaf said. "This violence is unacceptable and we cannot stay quiet about it. ... Our leadership at every level, in every institution and across the government needs to come out and say, 'This needs to stop.'"

White House officials have not released a statement. The AJC on Sunday reached out to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which did not immediately respond for comment.

Yousaf is normally at her CDC office and has been with the agency since 2019. But on Friday, she was working remotely when the alert system notified her around 5 p.m. about the active shooter.

In a panic, she tried to message her team at her office. All they knew was that workers were hearing gunshots and seeing bullets hit the windows next to them. They eventually made it out without any physical injuries, but the mental damage was done.

"They told me they couldn't stop shaking. They needed to throw up. They were crying uncontrollably, and I heard that people were going to Emory with acute stress symptoms and panic attacks," Yousaf told the AJC.

During the chaos, about 90 children were being held at the CDC child care center. That included Abigail Tighe's 1-year-old boy, who was with the other kids under lockdown. She said she was initially "very scared" until the center let her know that everyone was safe. It serves employees of Emory University and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

"There's nothing like being reunited with your child after you're worried they could have been in a mass shooting when they're a year old," according to Tighe, who worked as a public health advisor at the CDC but was laid off this year.



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During the news conference that was organized by Fired But Fighting, a network of former CDC professionals, attendees also spoke in admiration for Rose, who was critically injured and died at Emory University Hospital. He was the fourth Georgia law enforcement member killed in the line of duty this year.

"Officer Rose made the ultimate sacrifice to save hundreds of lives. We are all forever grateful and indebted, indebted to him and his family," Tighe said.



DeKalb County resident Willie Anthony salutes the memorial of DeKalb County police officer David Rose, 33, outside the headquarters of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Sunday, Aug. 10, 2025. Rose died in the line of duty while responding to a shooter who directed bullets at the CDC on Friday. (Miguel Martinez/AJC)

Employees were told there would be increased patrols in the area after the shooting and that law enforcement and security teams were still assessing next steps.

Both Soda and Yousaf said they were told to work remotely until at least Monday. They said no time off has been given to them.

"I want to do my work, but I don't want my colleagues to be retraumatized by walking past all these bullet holes in the glass that are right next to where they sit," Yousaf said.

"Sitting there will never feel the same to me again," Soda added.

About the Author

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