

# U.S. Immigration Officials' Continued Medical Neglect Leads to Child's Death

By [Physicians for Human Rights](#)

Global Research, May 22, 2019

Physicians for Human Rights

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

*Following the fifth death of a child in U.S. custody in recent months, [Physicians for Human Rights \(PHR\)](#) is renewing its call for the immediate release of all detained children to community-based settings, access to independent medical providers for all detained children, and an independent investigation into the deaths. A 16-year-old boy from Guatemala, identified as Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez, died on Monday in Texas after being diagnosed with the flu the day before. Vasquez had been waiting in a detention facility for a week pending relocation to a shelter for migrant children.*

"The death of the fifth immigrant child in U.S. custody in the last six months is a damning indictment of this administration's continued policy of detaining children and a stark reminder that detention poses a grave threat to children's health," said [Kathryn Hampton](#), Asylum Network program officer for PHR. "The fact that this child was held in Customs and Border Protection custody for seven days violates [CBP's own guidelines](#), which cap short-term detention at 72 hours. These facilities don't even have showers or beds, much less adequate medical screening procedures and staff. What more evidence does the administration need that no child belongs in a holding cell?"

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has failed to consistently employ appropriately trained medical professionals to screen asylum seekers. Holding cells are commonly referred to as "hieleras" or "iceboxes," and are known for their uncomfortably low temperatures and cramped spaces. The small holding cells, designed for temporary use, lack furnishings such as beds and provide no privacy. Asylum seekers are, at most, provided a thin Mylar blanket and mat to place on the cement floor for sleeping on.

Many Border Patrol stations and processing centers are located in remote areas, which hinders access to emergency medical care, resulting in delayed treatment and perhaps even unavoidable deaths. Preliminary medical screenings are conducted by apprehending agents, who are often not medically qualified to determine if further care is needed. While CBP recently began employing physicians to conduct screenings at the border, the agency still lacks trained pediatricians to screen children for injuries or illness.

"PHR is calling on the Department of Homeland Security to cease holding children in CBP detention facilities and to provide adequate standards for essential care of all persons in custody," said [Michael Payne](#), advocacy officer for PHR. "Congress must ensure that asylum seekers receive timely medical treatment from properly trained medical professionals."

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