



## Public Health Brief

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Monday March 31, 2025

This is the beginning of a 3-part series. The next 2 sections will include:

- Can You Prevent Measles from Attacking Your Family?
- Rumors and Falsehoods – What Not to Do

To review more specific information about measles, go to:

<https://alpinecountyca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7570/ACPHB-measles-22525>

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## Measles: What is Happening? Why Should You and Your Family Be Concerned?

### What is happening?

Over the past 160 years, life expectancy (from birth) in the United States has risen from 39.4 years in 1860, to 78.9 years in 2020. Much of the improvement in the 1900's was due to vaccines. Most people today have never experienced measles thanks to vaccines which were rolled out in the 1960's. In the decade before the vaccine's introduction, an estimated 3 to 4 million people a year were infected with measles in the U.S. Of those, an estimated 48,000 people were hospitalized and 400 to 500 people died each year.

The U.S. achieved measles elimination in the year 2000, after documenting a year without any continuous spread of the virus. But now after 25 years we are at risk of losing that status!



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Alpine County Health Department, 75-B Diamond Valley Rd., Markleeville, CA 96120  
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District 1: Charles Dobson, District 2: Evan Mecak, District 3: Irvin Jim,  
District 4: Terry Woodrow, District 5: David Griffith

So far in 2025 there have been almost 500 cases of measles in the United States, developing in 19 states. California has reported 8 cases so far in 2025, most related to international travel (Fresno, Los Angeles, Orange, Placer, San Mateo, and Tuolumne Counties). In 2024, 15 cases were confirmed in California, with 4 cases in 2023.

93% of U.S. cases have been linked to five confirmed outbreaks (the largest in Texas, with spread to New Mexico and Oklahoma). An outbreak is defined as 3 or more linked cases. Several dozen new cases in Kansas are possibly related to the Texas outbreak, as are over 40 cases in the northern Mexico state of Chihuahua. Public Health Ontario (Canada) is reporting almost 500 outbreak-associated cases.

There have been dozens of hospitalizations, with several patients requiring ventilator support. Texas has reported the death of an unvaccinated 6 year old child, and New Mexico reports an unvaccinated adult who tested positive for measles after dying. We can expect to see additional cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in the months to come.

Measles anywhere is a threat everywhere. Because measles is so contagious, it can easily cross borders. Right now, measles outbreaks are happening in every region of the world, with the highest rates in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central and Southeast Asia. Anyone who is not protected against measles can get measles while abroad and easily spread it to others when they return home.

### Why is this happening?

The increase in measles cases can be attributed to falling vaccination rates. Outbreaks are caused when the measles vaccine coverage slips below 95% of the eligible population. In addition, in the U.S., most non-outbreak related cases occur when unvaccinated people acquire measles abroad and bring it back to the U.S.

Measles is the most transmissible disease known to mankind. It spreads when someone infected speaks, coughs, sneezes or breathes and can linger in the air up to 2 hours after the infected person has left. Someone who is infected can spread the disease to other people before noticing any symptoms, especially in the four days before and after a rash develops. Roughly 90% of persons unvaccinated and exposed to measles will contract the disease.



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## Who is at highest risk?

- infants and children under 5 years of age
- adults aged 20 years and over
- pregnant women
- people with weakened immune systems from medications or underlying disease

## Why is this increase in cases a “big deal”?

Measles is and never was a benign disease that does not threaten health or life. The possible consequences for people who become infected are:

- 1 in 5 will require hospitalization
- 1 in 20 will develop pneumonia, the most common cause of death
- 1 in 1,000 will develop encephalitis, a brain infection causing convulsions, deafness, and intellectual disability if not death
- the rare development of SSPE – subacute sclerosing panencephalitis, usually years later in early adolescence
- 1-3 of 1,000 cases will die from respiratory or neurological complications
- cases in women who are pregnant can result in prematurity and low birth weight
- the development of “immune amnesia” – long-term damage to the immune system leaving a person vulnerable to other infections for years

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/about/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/measles.aspx>

<https://yourlocalepidemiologist.substack.com/about>

<https://alpinecountyca.gov/516/Public-Health-Briefs>

## Next – Can You Prevent Measles From Attacking Your Family?



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