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Measles outbreak in Texas was "completely preventable," infectious disease expert says



By [Sara Moniuszko](#), David Higgins

Edited By [Allison Elyse Gualtieri](#)

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Measles outbreak expands in West Texas



[Measles outbreak expands in West Texas 05:10](#)

As a West Texas county is dealing with a [measles outbreak](#), experts are reminding Americans outbreaks like these can be avoided with [safe, effective and available vaccines](#).

Health officials confirmed Tuesday that [two dozen people](#) have been identified with measles in Gaines County, Texas, which has one of the highest rates of vaccine exemptions in the entire state. All of the confirmed measles cases in the county involve unvaccinated residents, and nine patients have been hospitalized.

"It is troubling, because this was completely preventable," Dr. Amesh Adalja, an infectious disease physician and senior scholar at Johns Hopkins, [told CBS News](#) on Wednesday. "What we're seeing is, one of the places in Texas — it has the lowest vaccination rates, the highest school exemption rates from measles vaccination — having a measles outbreak, including hospitalizations of individuals who've been infected with measles."

Adalja said this should act as a reminder that measles is still a risk when proper precautions aren't taken.

"It's the most contagious infectious disease known to humans. And when we start to see measles outbreak, that's a sign that there is a chink in the armor of vaccination and the fact that it's preventable, I think, is what people should understand. This doesn't have to happen if we can get vaccination rates back to high levels again."

Measles vaccine

"If somebody is fully vaccinated against measles and has a normal immune system, they don't need to worry about measles," said Adalja. "You're not going to be at risk for contracting measles because the vaccine the vaccine is very, very effective."

One dose of the MMR vaccine, which protects against measles, mumps and rubella, is [93% effective](#) against measles and the recommended two doses is 97% effective, research shows.

[Studies have shown](#) the MMR vaccine, which was first introduced in 1971, may be given safely and effectively in combination with other vaccines.

"It's those individuals who are not vaccinated, or maybe they're too young to be vaccinated, or the parents who chose not to get them vaccinated," Adalja said.

Risk of vaccination rate decline

Nationwide, at least 10 states have seen [vaccination rates](#) fall, jeopardizing the country's [herd immunity](#) from widespread outbreaks.

Like Texas, some Florida schools — such as an elementary school in Broward County last year — have [seen measles outbreaks](#). The vaccination rate for Florida kindergartners has fallen to 88.1%, according to the CDC, the lowest in decades.

Dr. Jeffrey Goldhagen, a pediatrician and professor at the University of Florida, [recently told CBS News](#), "90% is nowhere near good enough. That coverage rate will allow for the spread of [vaccine-preventable diseases](#)."

He said if vaccination rates continue to dip, the U.S. could see "increased numbers of children infected. It means epidemics of measles. We are at great risk for re-emergence of polio in this country."

Measles symptoms

The [initial symptoms](#) of measles are similar to those of many other common viral illnesses in the U.S., including:

- Fever
- Cough

- Runny nose
- Red eyes

Several days after symptoms begin, characteristic tiny white spots develop inside the mouth, and a facial rash spreads to the rest of the body.

While most people's symptoms improve, 1 in 5 unvaccinated people will be hospitalized, 1 out of every 1,000 will develop brain swelling that can lead to brain damage, and up to [3 of every 1,000 will die](#).

[Manuel Bojorquez](#) contributed to this report.

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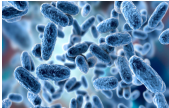
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