

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 11, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy Jr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services  
200 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

We are deeply concerned about the recent outbreaks of measles across the country. So far, measles cases have been reported by thirteen jurisdictions, including Alaska, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York City, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington. As of March 6, 2025, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has [reported](#) a total of 222 cases of measles, mostly in unvaccinated babies, children, and teenagers. This has led to the hospitalization of 38 people with serious symptoms, most of which are children and babies under 5 years old. Unfortunately, two of these cases have resulted in the tragic deaths of [a child in Texas](#) and [a resident in New Mexico](#). These mark the first U.S. deaths from measles in 10 years. It is imperative that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) act immediately and robustly to stop the spread of this preventable infection and save American lives.

Measles is a highly infectious respiratory virus that can survive in the air for up to 2 hours. Just one infected person can infect as many as 18 people. While many recover, some experience dangerous complications like pneumonia, blindness, brain swelling, and death. There is a safe and highly effective measles vaccine available (MMR or measles-mumps-rubella vaccine), with an estimated vaccine effectiveness of 93% with one dose and 97% with two doses. Thanks to widespread administration of this vaccine, measles was declared eliminated from the United States in 2000.

As you have acknowledged, the measles vaccine is an important tool to protect children and contribute to community immunity against this life-threatening infection. However, increasing vaccine misinformation and hesitancy has lowered vaccination rates, leading to outbreaks like we are seeing today. According to the CDC, 95 percent of active measles cases are in unvaccinated individuals or individuals with unknown vaccination status. In fact, in Gaines County, Texas—the epicenter of one of the outbreaks—less than [82 percent](#) of kindergarteners are vaccinated against measles, increasing the risk of infection among children, in particular. More must be done to increase vaccination rates against measles. Clear communication that vaccines work is imperative to build trust and increase uptake of vaccinations, ultimately saving lives. Therefore, it is critical that HHS utilize its authorities to promote vaccination against measles as the most effective way to prevent infection to improve vaccination rates and prevent future outbreaks.

Additionally, to ensure a robust and timely response to the ongoing measles outbreaks, the CDC must be operating at its top capacity. In addition to a measles vaccine campaign, the CDC must have the ability to collect and report measles case data on a timely basis, a robust public health workforce to assist in the response, and continue to make recommendations regarding vaccine use through its Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. CDC currently posts weekly measles tracking data on the CDC website, while both Texas and New Mexico update their tracking data on Tuesdays and Fridays. These updates are

critical for public health officials and everyday Americans to effectively track the rapid spread of this life-threatening disease. We urge you to direct CDC to increase the frequency of its measles tracking updates.

The public health workforce is critical in protecting American communities from outbreaks by tracking disease, communicating health threats, administering vaccines, and caring for sick patients. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently [warned](#) that current health care workforce shortages inhibit the U.S.'s ability to protect and improve the health of Americans. Despite these documented workforce shortages, you and the Trump Administration indiscriminately fired [750 CDC employees](#) responsible for assisting local authorities in detecting diseases, preventing the introduction of pathogens from abroad, and modeling potential impacts of disease outbreaks. While some staff have been reinstated, these firings are irresponsible during an active measles outbreak and threaten the U.S.'s ability to respond to the next public health emergency. In your recent [op-ed](#), you stated that, “[Healthcare professionals’] dedication and resilience are commendable, and they deserve unwavering support. It is essential that we provide them with the resources and backing they need to continue their vital work.” In line with these comments, we urgently request that you reinstate all fired federal health workers and protect those remaining from termination to help stop the spread of measles and other infectious diseases.

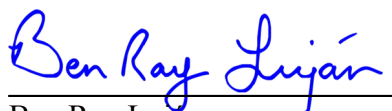
Lastly, one of HHS’s authorities in this area is the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which [you committed](#) to maintaining without changes, is critical for ensuring safe and effective vaccination practices among Americans. Resources developed by ACIP help health care providers make vaccination recommendations to their patients and empower Americans to make informed decisions about their health. We are troubled by the cancellation of ACIP’s scheduled meeting and [reports](#) that HHS plans to remove ACIP members. We urge you to keep your promise.

In closing, urgent action is needed to stop the spread of measles and save American lives. To mitigate the further spread of this life-threatening disease, we urge you to first and foremost launch a national vaccination campaign. Secondly, you should utilize HHS’ authorities and data-driven outbreak mitigation strategies. It is imperative you take action now.

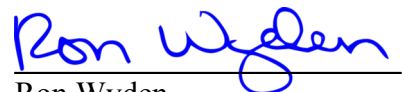
Please provide a response detailing HHS’ plan to help stop the spread of measles by Tuesday, March 18, 2025.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

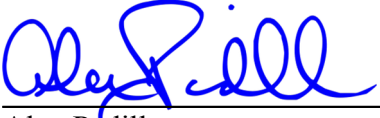
Sincerely,



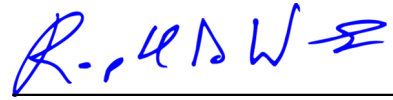
Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



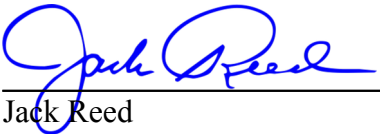
Cory A. Booker  
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Martin Heinrich  
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Tammy Duckworth  
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Mazie K. Hirono  
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