

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 24, 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 concerned about the recent outbreak of measles in New Mexico. As of Wednesday, there are nine people with confirmed cases of measles in isolation in Lea County, New Mexico. This news comes as the nearby counties of Gaines, Terry, Lubbock, and Yoakum in Texas have recently reported 90 cases with 16 people hospitalized. Given the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) important responsibility to stop the spread of infectious diseases, we request that you utilize HHS' authorities for testing and monitoring and vaccine education and promotion, as well as rehire critical federal employees, to stop the spread of this dangerous infection.

Measles is one of the most highly infectious diseases because the virus can survive in the air for up to 2 hours. Ninety percent of people who are susceptible will become infected if exposed. While many recover, some experience serious complications like pneumonia, blindness, brain swelling, and death.

Preventing and mitigating outbreaks is only possible through effective disease tracking and communication, an adequate workforce, and vaccination. States report confirmed measles cases to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System. Previously, measles tracking on the CDC website was consistently updated weekly. These updates are critical for public health officials to effectively track the rapid spread of this life-threatening disease. We urge you to maintain posting updated measles tracking data weekly.

The public health workforce protects community health by tracking disease and communicating with the public about health threats. But on January 29, 2025, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that there are still health care workforce shortages that inhibit the U.S.'s ability to protect and improve the health of American communities. Despite these health care workforce shortages, federal employees have been fired from the CDC, National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Indian Health Service (IHS). Just last Friday, two dozen employees at the CDC charged with training public health laboratory staffers and supporting outbreak response efforts were fired. These firings will worsen outbreaks and ultimately threaten the health of all Americans in the face of the next public health emergency. We urgently request that you reinstate the fired federal health workers to help stop the spread of measles and other infectious diseases.

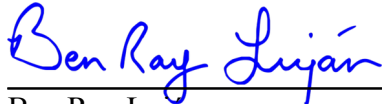
Finally, the most effective way to protect people from contracting measles is to increase vaccination rates as quickly as possible. The measles vaccine, which also inoculates against mumps and rubella, has been in use for about 60 years and has consistently been found to be safe and effective. We urge you to keep your commitment to maintain the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations for vaccination. The ACIP is critical for ensuring safe and effective vaccination practices among American adults and children. The resources provided by the ACIP not only help health care providers make vaccination recommendations to their patients but also empower everyday Americans to make informed decisions about their health. Given that most of the infected individuals are unvaccinated, more must be done to increase vaccination rates against measles. Vaccination rates can and should be increased and therefore we request that HHS launch a national campaign to improve measles vaccination rates to prevent future outbreaks.

In closing, your action is urgently needed to stop the spread of measles in New Mexico and across America. In order to mitigate the further spread of this life-threatening disease, we urge you to utilize HHS' authorities and proven outbreak

mitigation strategies. Specifically, we are asking that you maintain weekly disease tracking data updates, rehire federal health workers, launch a vaccination promotion campaign against measles and other life-threatening infectious diseases, and trust the recommendations of public health experts, physicians, and scientists.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



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Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



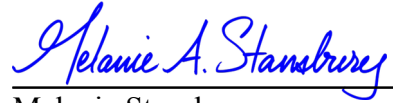
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Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



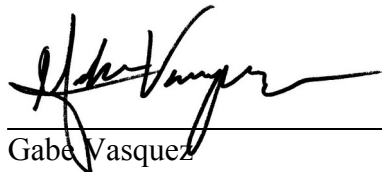
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Teresa Leger Fernández  
Member of Congress



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Melanie Stansbury  
Member of Congress



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Gabe Vasquez  
Member of Congress