

Utah's Measles Outbreak: What Parents Need to Know Before School Starts

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As Utah students head back to school, physicians and public health leaders are urging parents to talk with their trusted health care provider about vaccinations. Utah's measles outbreak, now more than a year old, continues to spread and doctors say routine immunization remains the best protection for children and communities.

THE SCOPE

- Utah currently has the second-highest number of measles cases of any state in the nation.
- Measles has been circulating in Utah for more than a year, and it is not going away on its own and remains an ongoing risk to anyone unvaccinated.
- The outbreak has persisted in communities where vaccination rates have fallen below the level needed to stop the virus from spreading (herd immunity).

"As family physicians, our highest priority is protecting the health and future of the children in our community. In an era where conflicting health advice spreads rapidly online, parents deserve a safe, open space to ask tough questions. Your child's doctor knows your family's health history and relies on rigorous, proven science to guide every recommendation. Before the school bell rings this fall, we encourage every parent to reach out to their family physician to make sure they are fully protected against preventable diseases like measles."

— **Jordan R. Roberts, MD, Family Physician**

THE SEVERITY

- Measles is often a severe infection, not a mild childhood illness.
- 1 in 3 Utahns diagnosed with measles has required emergency room care, and **1 in 12** has been admitted to the hospital.
- Potential complications include pneumonia, dehydration, brain swelling (encephalitis), and, in rare cases, death.
- Infants, pregnant women, and people who are immunocompromised face the highest risk of severe outcomes.

"Even the best case of measles is an awful illness to deal with. And when it goes wrong, it goes really wrong. We can keep our kids and communities safe from this disease; we just have to be willing to work together for the greater good."

— **T.W. Jones, MD, MMC, FAAP, MEd, Pediatric Infectious Disease Specialist**

THE VACCINE

- The **MMR vaccine** (measles, mumps, rubella) is safe, effective, and has decades of real-world use behind it.
- **Two doses provide about 97% protection** against measles.
- The first dose is recommended at 12–15 months and a second at 4–6 years old; catch-up doses are available at any age.

WHY THIS ISN'T JUST ABOUT MEASLES

- Declining vaccination rates put Utah at risk for other vaccine-preventable diseases, including mumps, chickenpox, and Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b).
- Whooping cough (pertussis) cases have already risen both nationally and in Utah over the past year, another disease preventable through vaccination.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO NOW, BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS

1. **Check immunization records** and schedule a visit if your child is behind on any recommended vaccines.
2. **Talk to your doctor, not social media.** Your pediatrician, family physician, or advanced practice clinician knows your child's health history.
3. **Don't wait for an outbreak nearby.** Measles spreads quickly and can appear anywhere: schools, stores, places of worship.
4. **Trust the MMR vaccine's safety record.** Two doses offer strong, lasting protection.

TODAY'S SPEAKERS

Name	Role
Leisha Nolen, MD, PhD	Utah State Epidemiologist, Utah Department of Health and Human Services
T.W. Jones, MD, MMC, FAAP, MEd	Pediatric Infectious Disease Specialist
Jordan R. Roberts, MD	Family Physician
Lee Cherie Booth, RN	Immunization Nurse Supervisor, Salt Lake County Health Department

Physicians and clinical staff are available for one-on-one interviews and photo opportunities following today's event.

About the Utah Academy of Family Physicians

The Utah Academy of Family Physicians (UAFP) is the Utah chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians, representing family medicine physicians, residents, and students across the state who provide comprehensive, continuous care to patients of all ages.