

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 11, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

I am writing with deep concern over your response – or lack thereof – to the rapid resurgence and spread of measles across the United States over the past several months. Under your tutelage as Secretary, you have undermined vaccines, gutted public health funding, and dismantled core federal protections meant to keep Americans safe. By destabilizing the nation's infectious disease response infrastructure via conducting mass layoffs including infectious disease scientists, indiscriminately issuing careless and devastating grant freezes and rescissions, and politicizing the overhaul of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), you have walked our country into the nation's largest measles outbreak in 33 years, leading cases to hit a record high a full 25 years after this country eliminated the disease. What began as a localized outbreak in Texas has now exploded into a nationwide public health crisis, infecting nearly 1,300 Americans across 38 states, hospitalizing scores, and proving to be deadly.

To prevent this historic record high spread from reaching further and to save lives, you should immediately declare a Public Health Emergency for measles.

The rapid resurgence and spread of measles is alarming and requires dedication of more federal resources. Measles was declared eliminated in the United States in 2000, after years of implementing an effective two-dose vaccination campaign for children. Recent months have seen a rapidly spreading outbreak concentrated mostly in Texas with three reported deaths – all in unvaccinated Americans. It is incredibly troubling that these tragic deaths due to measles – the first since 2015 – are being met with an inadequate public health response marked by the absence of available federal funding, personnel, and resources. As a painful but pertinent reminder, you've laid off disease experts, canceled National Institutes of Health (NIH) research into vaccine hesitancy, fired scientists from the nation's top immunization panel, and stripped over \$11 billion in federal public health grants — including \$550 million from Texas during the peak of its outbreak. In Dallas County alone, 50 vaccine clinics closed, and 21 public health workers were laid off. This is not a coincidence. This is a catastrophe of your own making. And while families grieved and health departments begged for help, you told the public that *"it's not unusual"* to see measles deaths. You pushed vitamin A instead of vaccines, and days after finally acknowledging that the MMR vaccine prevents measles, you returned to sowing doubt about autism — a dangerous, long-debunked conspiracy theory. Secretary Kennedy, the American people need a public health response. Not political theater. Not conspiracy. Not silence.

This isn't just failure, it's malpractice: measles is one of the most contagious viruses known to science — and one of the most preventable. Measles is highly contagious - one infected person can spread it to up to 90% of unvaccinated people nearby. The longer the federal government delays, the more children are placed in danger, and the more states will see Texas's nightmare play out in their own communities.

As of July 9, the country has recorded nearly 1,300 cases in 38 states: Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. The delayed and inadequate response from HHS and the rest of the Trump administration indicates that the number of measles cases could continue to rise throughout the country. Now is the time to commit to an enhanced public health informed response to prevent any more American deaths.

I call on you as Secretary of Health and Human Services to declare a nationwide Public Health Emergency to expand resources to address the worst measles outbreak in over three decades in the U.S. The federal government, states, and localities must all leverage funding, personnel, and other resources toward fighting unyielding outbreaks.

Your continued undermining of vaccines, including the termination of NIH grants for vaccine hesitancy studies, and the more recent firing of vaccine experts on ACIP, paired with an inadequate public health response in the most affected parts of the country have undoubtedly exacerbated the severity of the measles outbreak. You have an opportunity to protect the health of millions of Americans by demonstrating support for vaccination and a robust measles response. Otherwise, Americans will die from diseases for which there are safe and effective solutions we are choosing not to use.

You hold the levers of the nation's public health infrastructure. Right now, you are using them to dismantle it. This outbreak will only get worse without urgent, science-based leadership.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator