

HEALTH

Answers to your questions and some general guidelines on the measles outbreak in Texas

Texas is in the midst of the worst measles outbreak in decades, with 90 cases across 7 counties. Here's what to know.

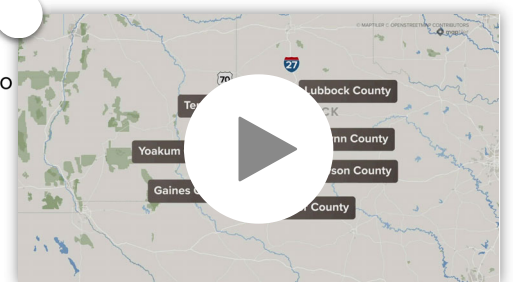
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DALLAS — Measles cases are spreading across Texas, with new warnings issued in San Antonio, New Braunfels and San Marcos.

The Texas Department of Health and Human Services reports 90 cases in the outbreak so far, with 16 patients hospitalized due to the virus.

And some public health experts believe the number of actual cases is likely greater.



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"What you're seeing is the tip of the iceberg," said Dr. Diana Cervantes, Associate Professor of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at the University of North Texas Health Science Center.

Measles is "probably the most infectious contagious disease on the planet," said Dr. Suzanne Whitworth, Division Chief of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Cook Children's in Fort Worth.

"We know that about 40% of kids under the age of five who get measles are gonna wind up in the hospital, and nobody wants that," Whitworth said.

It all started in [Gaines County on February 5](#) with someone who tested positive for measles and traveled to Texas State University, the [University of Texas San Antonio](#), the Riverwalk and a Buc-ees over Valentine's Day and the following weekend. Since then, Dawson, Ector, Lubbock, Lynn, Terry and Yoakum Counties have also reported measles cases. The virus has also crossed over to New Mexico which is reporting 9 cases.

What is measles?

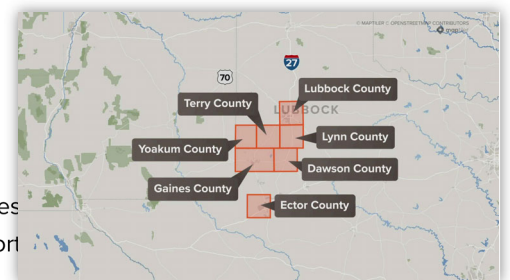
According to the Centers for Disease Control, measles is a highly contagious virus that can be serious. In its definition, the CDC notes, "Anyone who is not protected against measles is at risk," adding that two doses of the MMR vaccine provide the best protection against measles.

What are the symptoms?

- Rash with red, flat spots that begins on the face and spreads down to the rest of the body
- High fever, can spike to greater than 104
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes

How does it spread?

Measles spreads through infectious droplets and the air when an infected person breathes coughs or sneezes, according to the [Texas Department of State Health Services](#). It's important



to note that the measles virus can remain infectious in the air up to two hours after an infected person leaves.

Symptoms of measles don't show up until a week, sometimes two weeks, after exposure. The challenge is that those infected are contagious about four days before any outward signs of the virus appear.

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Dr. Carla Garcia Carreno, Director for Infection Prevention and Control at Children's Medical Center Plano, shared, "The incubation period is about 8 to 14 days, but it can range from 7 to 21 days."

She adds, "You can have been exposed and infected with the measles and not have symptoms for up to 21 days and usually the person that contracts measles is contagious from 4 days before the onset of the rash until 4 days after the onset of the rash. So for those 8 days. However, the tricky thing here is that before you develop a rash, you can have symptoms that are very non-specific, like influenza-like. with cough, fever, congestion, and conjunctivitis. So you may think you have the flu and, it's measles and you may be spreading to all the vulnerable people without knowing that you have the measles."

What if I suspect I've been exposed to measles?

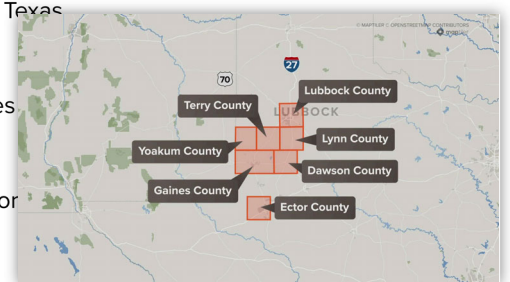
The Texas Department of State Health Services provides guidance for those who believe they have been exposed to measles.

- Stay home from work, school and other group settings until after the fourth day of the rash onset
- Isolate, especially if you are unvaccinated against measles
- Call your doctor before you show up to get tested, so they can prepare
- Unvaccinated kids shall be excluded from schools and childcare settings for at least 21 days from exposure to a measles case, according to the Texas Administrative Code

Get more information on how long kids will be out of school and when they can return to Texas [online here](#).

Whitworth said a vaccinated person "should be fine" if they were on the college campuses inside the restaurants or Buc-ees while the measles patients was there.

But she suggests an unvaccinated or immunocompromised person contact their doctor for guidance..



If fever, a runny nose, pink eye, or a rash develops within that 21-period but the illness isn't too severe, Whitworth suggests calling a provider before going to a clinic or emergency room in order to keep from exposing a waiting room to the virus.

What are the risks of measles?

Measles can cause serious health complications, especially in children younger than 5 years of age. Common complications are ear infections and diarrhea. Serious complications include pneumonia and encephalitis, according to the CDC.

"That's the age group where most hospitalizations and complications have been described. Again, this will be mostly on those less than 5 years of age that have not been vaccinated. So historically, because measles was a disease that we rarely see, most of the adult people are already immune for prior vaccination because of the fact that there was no circulation," Dr. Carreno said.

Hospitalization and complications during pregnancy are also documented risks of the virus.

In addition to young children, those most at risk also include pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems, such as from leukemia or HIV infection.

What is the recommended vaccine schedule?

According to the CDC, measles was eradicated in 2000 and has been rarely reported since then. The agency stresses that the best protection is the vaccine.

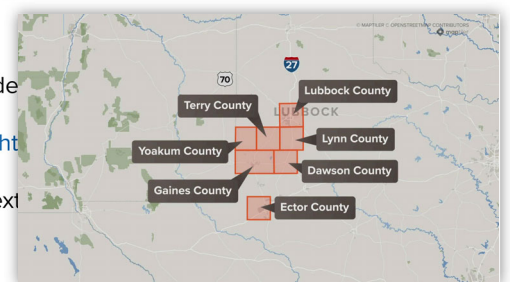
The CDC recommends all children get two doses of the MMR, or measles-mumps-rubella, vaccine with the first dose at 12 to 15 months of age and the second dose at 4 to 6 years of age. Children can also get the second dose earlier, at least 28 days following the first dose.

For students at post-high school educational institutions without the vaccine, a two-dose MMR vaccine is recommended, separated by at least 28 days.

For adults who do not have the vaccine, at least one dose of MMR vaccine is recommended.

Full schedule and information here: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mmr/public/index.html>

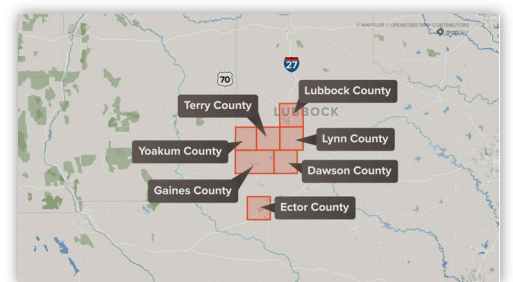
Whitworth suggests families with babies who are too young to receive the vaccine take extra precautions.



"Make sure the parents' vaccines are up to date, make sure the siblings' vaccines are up to date. If grandparents are keeping those kids, make sure the grandparents' vaccines are up to date," she said. "Avoid any contact with people who have cough, runny nose, red eyes, or a rash. Avoid all ill contacts."

Whitworth reminds families the vaccine has saved countless lives.

"This is one of the routine immunizations and remember that this is one of the most contagious diseases. If you were exposed, make sure that you isolate yourself and monitor because you may even be incubating and you can pass it on even if you don't have symptoms or if you have not developed the rash. So I think awareness and keeping ourselves informed with good sources is the key at this time," Dr. Carreno said.





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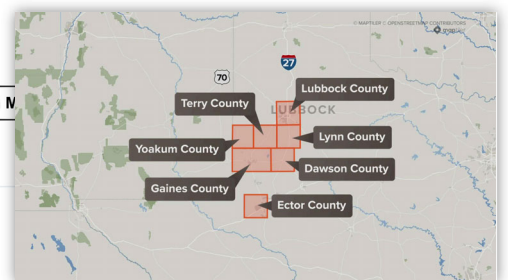
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