

[HealthWatch](#)

As U.S. is poised to lose measles-free status, RFK Jr.'s new CDC deputy downplays its significance



By Amy Maxmen

January 21, 2026 / 9:07 PM EST / KFF Health News

[Add CBS News on Google](#)

After a year of ongoing [measles outbreaks](#) that have sickened more than 2,400 [people](#), the United States is poised to lose its status as a measles-free country. However, the newly appointed principal deputy director at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ralph Abraham, said he was unbothered by the prospect at a briefing for journalists this week.

"It's just the cost of doing business with our borders being somewhat porous for global and international travel," Abraham said. "We have these communities that choose to be unvaccinated. That's their personal freedom."

Infections from other countries, however, accounted for only about 10% of measles cases detected since Jan. 20, 2025, the official start of the deadly measles outbreak in West Texas, which spread to other states and Mexico. The rest were acquired domestically. This marks a change since the U.S. eliminated measles in 2000. Measles occasionally popped up in the U.S. from people infected abroad, but the cases rarely sparked outbreaks, because of extremely high rates of vaccination. Two doses of the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine strongly [prevent infection](#) and halt the virus's spread.

[Manage Cookies](#)

To maintain its measles elimination status, the U.S. must prove that the virus has not circulated continuously in the nation for a year, between Jan. 20, 2025, and Jan. 20, 2026. To answer the question, scientists are examining whether the major outbreaks in South Carolina, Utah, Arizona, and Texas were linked.

Health officials confirmed that the main measles virus strain in each of these outbreaks is D8-9171. But because this strain also occurs in Canada and Mexico, CDC scientists are now analyzing the entire genomes of measles viruses – about 16,000 genetic letters long – to see whether those in the United States are more closely related to one another than to those in different countries.

The CDC expects to complete its studies within a couple of months and make the data public. Then the Pan American Health Organization, which oversees the Americas in partnership with the World Health Organization, will decide whether the U.S. will lose its measles elimination status. And that would mean that costly, potential on again.

Review and Manage Your Cookie Settings

If you consent, we and our 304 partners can store and access personal information on your device to provide a more personalised browsing experience. This is accomplished through processing personal data collected from browsing data stored in cookies. You can provide/withdraw consent and object to processing based on a legitimate interest at any time by clicking on the 'Manage' button.

For more information refer to our [Privacy Policy](#).

We and our partners process data to provide:

Store and/or access information on a device. Use limited data to select advertising. Create Profiles for personalized advertising. Use Profiles to select personalized advertising. Measure advertising performance. Create profiles to personalize content. Use profiles to select personalized content. Measure content performance. Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources. Develop and improve services. Use limited data to select content.

Accept

Reject

Manage

"When you hear somebody like Abraham say 'the cost of doing business,' how can you be more callous," said pediatrician and vaccine specialist Paul Offit, in an online

discussion hosted by the health blog Inside Medicine on Jan. 20. "Three people died of measles last year in this country," Offit added. "We eliminated this virus in the year 2000 – eliminated it. Eliminated circulation of the most contagious human infection. That was something to be proud of."

Abraham said vaccination remains the most effective way to prevent measles but that

parents m
states hav

dropped.
obtained

Informati

Robert F.

undermir

scientific

death.

Jennifer N

Trump ad

country's

attention

"If we kee

she said. '

Review and Manage Your Cookie Settings

If you consent, we and our 304 partners can store and access personal information on your device to provide a more personalised browsing experience. This is accomplished through processing personal data collected from browsing data stored in cookies. You can provide/withdraw consent and object to processing based on a legitimate interest at any time by clicking on the 'Manage' button.

For more information refer to our [Privacy Policy](#).

We and our partners process data to provide:

Store and/or access information on a device. Use limited data to select advertising. Create Profiles for personalized advertising. Use Profiles to select personalized advertising. Measure advertising performance. Create profiles to personalize content. Use profiles to select personalized content. Measure content performance. Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources. Develop and improve services. Use limited data to select content.

. Several
ates have

en,

Secretary

He has

peated

g, and

aged the

e the

ar

measles,"

The Trump administration impeded the CDC's ability to assist West Texas during the first critical weeks of its outbreak and slowed the release of federal emergency funds, according to KFF Health News investigations. However, the agency stepped up its activity last year, providing local health departments with measles vaccines, communication materials, and testing. Abraham said HHS would give South Carolina \$1.5 million to respond to its outbreak, which began nearly four months ago and had reached 646 cases as of Jan. 20.

If the CDC's genomic analyses show that last year's outbreaks resulted from separate introductions, it could mean that the CDC's in-
 saving the national i-
 August.

And if stu-
 administr-
 country's

Indeed, a
 nation's s-
 that the n-

Data show
 governme-
 with mea-

Lauren S-

KFF Hea-

health issues and is one of the core operating programs at KFF—an independent source of health policy research, polling, and journalism. Learn more about KFF.

Review and Manage Your Cookie Settings

If you consent, we and our 304 partners can store and access personal information on your device to provide a more personalised browsing experience. This is accomplished through processing personal data collected from browsing data stored in cookies. You can provide/withdraw consent and object to processing based on a legitimate interest at any time by clicking on the 'Manage' button.

For more information refer to our [Privacy Policy](#).

We and our partners process data to provide:

Store and/or access information on a device. Use limited data to select advertising. Create Profiles for personalized advertising. Use Profiles to select personalized advertising. Measure advertising performance. Create profiles to personalize content. Use profiles to select personalized content. Measure content performance. Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources. Develop and improve services. Use limited data to select content.

More from CBS News

CBS SACRAMENTO

Sacramento County measles cases rise to 5 after 2 new infections



CBS DETROIT

Bovine tuberculosis detected in two Michigan cattle herds, officials say



CBS ATLANTA

Georgia lawmakers pass bill expanding care for sickle cell disease patients



CBS TEXAS

Texas Rangers join Camp Mystic flood investigation amid neglect allegations



Go deeper

THE FREEPRESS
This Week

THE FREEPRESS
Tough Lov

In: **Center**

KFF Health
produces i
health poli

Review and Manage Your Cookie Settings

If you consent, we and our 304 partners can store and access personal information on your device to provide a more personalised browsing experience. This is accomplished through processing personal data collected from browsing data stored in cookies. You can provide/withdraw consent and object to processing based on a legitimate interest at any time by clicking on the 'Manage' button.

For more information refer to our [Privacy Policy](#).

We and our partners process data to provide:

Store and/or access information on a device. Use limited data to select advertising. Create Profiles for personalized advertising. Use Profiles to select personalized advertising. Measure advertising performance. Create profiles to personalize content. Use profiles to select personalized content. Measure content performance. Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources. Develop and improve services. Use limited data to select content.



sles

n that
source for

Featured

Iran War Coverage

Artemis II
Watch CBS News

Masters 2026 Field

College Basketball Transfer Portal

Follow Us On

YouTube

Facebook

Instagram

X

Privacy

Privacy Policy

Manage Cookies

Terms of Use

More from

Newsletters

Podcasts

Download

Brand Studio

Sitemap

Company

About Paramount

Advertise With Us

Join Our Talent

Help

Feedback

Contact the Ombudsman

Review and Manage Your Cookie Settings

If you consent, we and our 304 partners can store and access personal information on your device to provide a more personalised browsing experience. This is accomplished through processing personal data collected from browsing data stored in cookies. You can provide/withdraw consent and object to processing based on a legitimate interest at any time by clicking on the 'Manage' button.

For more information refer to our [Privacy Policy](#).

We and our partners process data to provide:

Store and/or access information on a device. Use limited data to select advertising. Create Profiles for personalized advertising. Use Profiles to select personalized advertising. Measure advertising performance. Create profiles to personalize content. Use profiles to select personalized content. Measure content performance. Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources. Develop and improve services. Use limited data to select content.

Watch CBS News 2026 CBS Interactive Inc. All rights reserved.

Review and Manage Your Cookie Settings

If you consent, we and our 304 partners can store and access personal information on your device to provide a more personalised browsing experience. This is accomplished through processing personal data collected from browsing data stored in cookies. You can provide/withdraw consent and object to processing based on a legitimate interest at any time by clicking on the 'Manage' button.

For more information refer to our [Privacy Policy](#).

We and our partners process data to provide:

Store and/or access information on a device. Use limited data to select advertising. Create Profiles for personalized advertising. Use Profiles to select personalized advertising. Measure advertising performance. Create profiles to personalize content. Use profiles to select personalized content. Measure content performance. Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources. Develop and improve services. Use limited data to select content.