News



Dr. Leigh Bragg, pediatrician at Tiger Pediatrics, holds an MMR vaccine in Easley, S.C., Feb. 6, 2026. The MMR vaccine is a highly effective, safe, 2-dose immunization that protects against measles, mumps, and rubella. (OSV News/Reuters/Jayla Whitfield-Anderson)

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Amid a spike in measles cases in the U.S., an infectious diseases specialist, who is also a Catholic deacon, told OSV News that the church "has recommended measles vaccination to safeguard the health of children and families."

The U.S. has already seen more than 1,000 cases of measles in 2026, making the year so far one of the three worst years for measles infections in the U.S. since 2000, according to an analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data by NBC News.

Dr. Timothy Flanigan, a hospital doctor in Brown Medicine's Infectious Diseases Division, who also teaches at Brown Medical School and is a permanent deacon in the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, told OSV News that "we all need to be vigilant because it is a serious illness among children."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, measles is one of the most contagious diseases and can be dangerous in babies and young children. However, the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, or MMR — or the related MMRV vaccine, which protects against chickenpox too — is 97% effective against measles for those who receive both doses.

The Pontifical Academy for Life in 2017 issued updated moral considerations on vaccinations, telling Catholic parents they should vaccinate their children for the good of their children and the community, and they can do so with a "clear conscience."

"As Catholics, we always encourage the development of vaccines that do not utilize cell lines derived from an abortion," Flanigan said, noting that there is not a range of measles vaccines in the U.S. apart from the MMR or MMRV vaccines.

"The church and the Vatican have recommended vaccination and utilization of vaccines which are remotely connected to cell lines from an abortion if there are no alternatives," Flanigan said.

He added that "the choice of vaccination is always up to the individual and the parents," per that teaching.

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Sites of measles outbreaks included Ave Maria University, a Catholic university in Florida, and the Global Academy of South Carolina, a public charter school.

The outbreak has prompted some concern about inconsistent messaging on vaccines from federal health officials.

Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has a record as a vaccine critic, including his suggestion that they are linked to autism, which studies have consistently debunked. A nonprofit he once ran has claimed that risks associated with vaccine-preventable diseases are exaggerated.

But after measles cases increased last year, Kennedy later said the "most effective way to prevent the spread of measles is the MMR vaccine," in an April 2025 social media post.

More recently, earlier in March, a lawyer for the Trump administration argued in court that Kennedy has "broad, unreviewable authority" to alter policies governing the use of vaccines.

However, critics of Kennedy's approach included Jerome Adams, who was previously the surgeon general during Trump's first term. Adams wrote on X March 1 that Kennedy "helped fuel the hesitancy we're dealing with" when it comes to vaccines.

Meanwhile, amid a spike in measles cases in early 2026, Acting CDC Director Jay Bhattacharya and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services head Dr. Mehmet Oz have encouraged vaccination.

Measles, Bhattacharya said on social media, "is preventable, and vaccination remains the most effective way to protect yourself and those around you."

"Take the vaccine, please," Oz said in a recent CNN interview. "We have a solution for our problem."

Asked about the public policy response to the outbreak, Flanigan said, "Health officials should champion the benefits of the measles vaccination to address the risks of the measles outbreak."

"It is always important to recognize the fundamental rights of parents in concert with their health care providers to decide what's best for their children," Flanigan added.