

US risks losing measles elimination status with record cases

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An electron micrograph of the measles virus. Credit: CDC/ Courtesy of Cynthia S. Goldsmith

The United States risks losing its measles "elimination status" if current outbreaks continue, US health authorities said Thursday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said Thursday there have been 971 cases of [measles](#) reported in the US so far this year, which means more people have caught the [disease](#) in the last five [months](#) than in any entire calendar year since 1992, which saw 963 reported cases.

Authorities declared measles eliminated in the US in 2000, a goal set in 1966 with the introduction of the vaccine.

Measles is considered eliminated when there is an absence of continuous disease transmission for 12 months or more in a specific geographic area, according to the CDC.

An ongoing outbreak in and around New York City that started last fall is threatening the US's "elimination status"—if it continues for four more months, the country will no longer be able to say it has eliminated measles.

Even though the New York mayor began requiring city residents in heavily affected areas, many with large Orthodox Jewish communities, to be vaccinated starting in April, the city still had 173 cases that month and 60 in May.

The US has never counted zero measles cases. Since 2000, the number

has fluctuated between a few dozen and a few hundred cases per year, with 667 cases recorded during a 2014 outbreak in Ohio, especially in Amish communities.

The disease's resurgence can mostly be traced back to un- or under-vaccinated travelers who brought the infection back with them from abroad—that's what happened last year when cases were reported throughout the country, originating from the Philippines, Israel and Ukraine.

"Measles is preventable and the way to end this outbreak is to ensure that all children and adults who can get vaccinated, do get vaccinated," said CDC director Robert Redfield.

"Again, I want to reassure parents that vaccines are safe, they do not cause autism. The greater danger is the disease that vaccination prevents."

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