



The following message was sent to you through the Alaska Public Health Alert Network (AK PHAN). Please share this information with others who may be interested. Note: Contact information for the Alaska Section of Epidemiology can be found at the end of this message.

Measles Virus RNA Detected in Anchorage Wastewater

July 27, 2026

Summary

The Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) is notifying healthcare providers that measles virus RNA was detected in Anchorage wastewater samples collected on July 7, 8, 9, and 14, 2026. Although no confirmed human measles cases have been recently identified in Alaska, measles activity remains elevated nationwide, with reported case counts exceeding levels not seen in more than 35 years. Clinicians should continue to maintain a high index of suspicion for patients with compatible illness, immediately implement airborne isolation precautions for suspected cases, and promptly report any suspected measles cases to SOE at 907-269-8000.

Background

- Wastewater monitoring (WWM) is the testing of sewage for viruses, bacteria, toxins, or other substances that can be shed into wastewater via toilets, sinks, showers, laundry, and drains.
- WastewaterSCAN, a national wastewater surveillance program that uses molecular and genomic methods to monitor pathogens in wastewater, notified SOE on July 22 and 24 that metagenomic sequencing detected measles virus RNA in Anchorage wastewater samples collected on July 7, 8, 9, and 14, 2026. Additional testing indicated that measles virus RNA concentrations were very low in the tested samples.
- Taken together, these findings indicate measles virus activity in the Anchorage sewershed during July 7–14. The Anchorage sewershed includes the city of Anchorage and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) but does not include Eagle River or Girdwood.
- Wastewater surveillance findings cannot identify the source of the virus, determine whether transmission is occurring, or confirm a human measles case.
- The detection of measles virus in wastewater does **not** indicate that people are at risk of acquiring measles from wastewater. Measles spreads via respiratory transmission, not through wastewater.

Recommendations for Healthcare Providers

Continue to maintain a high index of suspicion for measles in any patient with compatible illness, particularly those with recent domestic or international travel, exposure to travelers, or unknown or incomplete measles vaccination.

Clinical features include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Coryza
- Conjunctivitis
- Koplik spots (when present)
- Generalized maculopapular rash beginning on the face and spreading downward

If measles is suspected:

- Immediately place the patient in airborne isolation using airborne infection control precautions.
- Notify the Section of Epidemiology immediately at 907-269-8000 (after hours: 800-478-0084).
- Coordinate laboratory testing with SOE.
- Do not delay reporting while awaiting laboratory confirmation.

Prompt recognition, isolation, and reporting are essential to rapidly identify cases and prevent secondary transmission if measles is circulating in the community.

Note: Once wastewater concentrations of a pathogen reach a reportable level (i.e., above the limit of detection for digital droplet PCR testing), the numbers are reported on a publicly accessible dashboard (available at: <https://data.wastewaterscan.org/>). Metagenomic sequencing data are not currently available on this dashboard, but WastewaterSCAN has indicated that they will be included in the future.

Information for the Public

Measles is highly preventable through vaccination despite being one of the most contagious infectious diseases. Everyone should make sure they are up to date with recommended measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccination. Children should receive two doses of MMR vaccine according to the routine immunization schedule; adults without evidence of immunity should discuss vaccination with their healthcare provider. Anyone planning international travel should ensure they are fully vaccinated before departure. Alaskans can review their immunization records through the [Docket® mobile application](#) or by contacting their healthcare provider or local public health clinic.