# Measles outbreak in Ontario threatens Canada’s elimination status with over 2,000 cases



Outside the emergency room of St Thomas Elgin General Hospital, approximately 200 km (125 miles) south-west of Toronto, a stark sign commands attention: “NO MEASLES VAX & FEVER COUGH RASH – STOP – DO NOT ENTER!” The sight of such a warning in the 21st century, in a country that achieved “elimination status” for measles back in 1998, marks a troubling return to a health crisis previously thought vanquished. Canada now stands on the brink of losing that hard-won milestone, primarily due to a significant outbreak of the highly contagious virus in south-western Ontario.

Since October, Ontario has reported a staggering 2,009 cases of measles, a figure that surpasses all cases recorded in the United States combined in 2025 and labels the province as the measles epicentre of the western hemisphere. The tally has surged alarmingly, with hundreds of new cases emerging in just the past month; three-quarters of those afflicted are unvaccinated children, according to Public Health Ontario. The outbreak has already claimed its first victim: a premature infant infected in utero by an unvaccinated mother, with health officials confirming that measles may have exacerbated the baby's other health complications.

Dr. Asmaa Hussain, head of paediatrics at the local hospital, noted, “We have not had a measles outbreak in the community of this size for as long as I have practiced. Lots of doctors have never seen measles before now.” She expressed concern that the actual number of cases might be even higher due to many families opting for home care rather than seeking hospital treatment.

Almost 40% of cases have been reported by the Southwestern Public Health Unit, which serves regions in Oxford county, Elgin county, and St Thomas. The scale of this outbreak, shocking as it may seem, has been perceived as predictable by frontline doctors and public health experts. Factors contributing to the crisis include outdated public health vaccination strategies, reduced access to family doctors, postponed routine immunisations because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a spike in vaccine hesitancy fuelled by misinformation online.

South-western Ontario is home to several close-knit, vaccine-hesitant religious communities, including some Mennonites, who are less likely to engage with public health messaging. The outbreak is believed to have stemmed from a Mennonite wedding in New Brunswick, from which the virus spread into Ontario. This multifaceted situation is echoed by reports of increasing measles cases in Alberta, where the province recorded 710 confirmed cases, marking the worst year since 1986.

Measles presents serious health complications; it is known to cause pneumonia, brain swelling, and even death. Highly preventable through vaccination, it thrives in communities that fall below the herd immunity threshold, which is typically set at 95% for the general population. Unfortunately, Canada’s measles vaccination rates have dropped from 90% in 2019 to 83% in 2023, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Dr. Hussain reported an unsettling trend: many infants under 12 months—who are ineligible for the vaccine—are now contracting measles from older siblings who are also unvaccinated. One infant was reported to have contracted the virus from their mother, who had caught it from her unvaccinated children. Interestingly, while it is illegal to send an unvaccinated child to school in Ontario without specific exemptions, these hesitancies pose a significant challenge in public health discussions.

Immunologist Dawn Bowdish from McMaster University highlighted an additional complication: roughly 20% of Canadians lack a family doctor, and many others have limited access to healthcare. Consequently, parents find it difficult to receive trustworthy guidance about vaccinations. Furthermore, the ease with which vaccine exemptions can be obtained exacerbates the situation, as individuals may leverage loopholes based on vague personal beliefs rather than solid medical or religious grounds.

As extensive efforts ramp up to counteract this outbreak, including the creation of vaccination clinics in south-western Ontario, the government faces substantial difficulties in persuading vaccine-hesitant populations. Public health strategies traditionally emphasising factual information have lost efficacy, necessitating a revaluation of communication methods with these communities—particularly given the heightened anxiety surrounding governmental trust since the pandemic.

Kumanan Wilson, a public health policy expert, underscored the need for authorities to adapt their strategies in communicating health risks. “They’re going to have to learn to navigate this new world of people not trusting government as much and more populist tendencies,” he remarked. Indeed, a recent Angus Reid Institute study indicated that a quarter of Canadians do not trust their provincial governments to manage the outbreak effectively, a figure rising to 27% in Ontario. Alarmingly, one in five Canadians with children under 18 express hesitancy towards vaccination.

Dr. Hussain expressed a growing concern: the current outbreak may not be the last. “My worry is about the next outbreak. Because there will be a next one coming, right?” she said, fearing that other previously controlled diseases could also resurge amid this evolving public health crisis.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/en/ontario-reports-death-child-measles-2025-06-05/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/0956a30c043b030ae79bc9f67c6ce89c), [[4]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/13/ontario-measles-cases-more-than-double-over-past-two-weeks-hospitalizations-up-to-31/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[5]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/20/ontario-sees-another-sharp-rise-in-measles-cases-while-outbreaks-grow-in-quebec-alberta/), [[6]](https://www.wechu.org/updates-alerts/public-health-update-clinicians-confirmed-measles-case-windsor-essex)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/en/ontario-reports-death-child-measles-2025-06-05/), [[7]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/05/01/ontario-sees-sharpest-rise-in-measles-yet-with-223-new-infections-since-last-week/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/en/ontario-reports-death-child-measles-2025-06-05/), [[5]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/20/ontario-sees-another-sharp-rise-in-measles-cases-while-outbreaks-grow-in-quebec-alberta/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/0956a30c043b030ae79bc9f67c6ce89c), [[6]](https://www.wechu.org/updates-alerts/public-health-update-clinicians-confirmed-measles-case-windsor-essex)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/en/ontario-reports-death-child-measles-2025-06-05/), [[6]](https://www.wechu.org/updates-alerts/public-health-update-clinicians-confirmed-measles-case-windsor-essex)
* Paragraph 8 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/en/ontario-reports-death-child-measles-2025-06-05/), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/0956a30c043b030ae79bc9f67c6ce89c), [[5]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/20/ontario-sees-another-sharp-rise-in-measles-cases-while-outbreaks-grow-in-quebec-alberta/)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[4]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/13/ontario-measles-cases-more-than-double-over-past-two-weeks-hospitalizations-up-to-31/), [[7]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/05/01/ontario-sees-sharpest-rise-in-measles-yet-with-223-new-infections-since-last-week/)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/0956a30c043b030ae79bc9f67c6ce89c), [[4]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/13/ontario-measles-cases-more-than-double-over-past-two-weeks-hospitalizations-up-to-31/)
* Paragraph 11 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/en/ontario-reports-death-child-measles-2025-06-05/), [[5]](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/20/ontario-sees-another-sharp-rise-in-measles-cases-while-outbreaks-grow-in-quebec-alberta/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/06/measles-outbreak-ontario-canada> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/en/ontario-reports-death-child-measles-2025-06-05/> - Ontario, Canada, reported its first measles-related death of 2025, involving a premature infant who contracted the virus in utero from an unvaccinated mother. This incident contributes to a significant measles outbreak in the province, with over 2,000 cases since October 2024, primarily among unvaccinated individuals. Measles, once considered eliminated in Canada since 1998, poses serious health risks, including pneumonia, brain swelling, and death. Health officials emphasize the importance of vaccination, especially for those planning to become pregnant. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/en/ontario-reports-death-child-measles-2025-06-05/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://apnews.com/article/0956a30c043b030ae79bc9f67c6ce89c> - A measles outbreak is rapidly spreading across North America, with over 2,500 confirmed cases in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, resulting in four deaths. The outbreak originated last fall in Ontario, Canada, then spread to Texas and New Mexico, and has escalated significantly in Mexico’s Chihuahua state. El Paso, Texas, now reports 38 cases, the highest outside West Texas, while nearby Ciudad Juarez has 14. A key factor has been the mobility of people across borders and within certain Mennonite Christian communities that span Canada, Mexico, and Texas. The first identified case in Chihuahua involved an 8-year-old Mennonite child who contracted measles while visiting family in Seminole, Texas. Cooperation between U.S. and Mexican health departments has been informal but effective, with vaccination clinics operating in border areas. The outbreak in Michigan has been linked to Ontario, which has over 1,000 cases. Despite high national vaccination rates, local pockets of under-vaccination leave communities vulnerable. Health officials across North America are urging increased immunization efforts, with estimates suggesting that responding to a single measles case in the U.S. can cost between $30,000 and $50,000. Experts emphasize the need to maintain at least a 95% vaccination rate to prevent such outbreaks. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/0956a30c043b030ae79bc9f67c6ce89c?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/13/ontario-measles-cases-more-than-double-over-past-two-weeks-hospitalizations-up-to-31/> - Ontario is experiencing a significant surge in measles cases, with Public Health Ontario reporting 350 total cases since an outbreak began on October 28, 2024. This marks a sharp increase of 173 cases since the previous report on February 27. The majority of new cases are connected to an interprovincial outbreak that began in New Brunswick, which has also spread to Manitoba. The spread has resulted in 31 hospitalizations in Ontario, including one child who required intensive care. Of those hospitalized, 30 were unvaccinated, and one person’s immunization status was unknown. Seven cases were reported in pregnant individuals—five unvaccinated and two who had received two doses of the measles vaccine. Public health officials attribute the outbreak expansion to transmission among unimmunized children and teens. Dr. Christine Navarro, a public health physician at Public Health Ontario, expressed concern over the unusual spread, noting it is not something the province has experienced in many years. ([cp24.com](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/13/ontario-measles-cases-more-than-double-over-past-two-weeks-hospitalizations-up-to-31/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/20/ontario-sees-another-sharp-rise-in-measles-cases-while-outbreaks-grow-in-quebec-alberta/> - Ontario is witnessing another sharp increase in measles cases, with Public Health Ontario reporting 470 cases since an outbreak began in October 2024. This represents an increase of 120 cases since March 14. The spread has resulted in 34 hospitalizations, including two individuals who required intensive care. Most of those hospitalized were unvaccinated children, including one of the intensive care patients. The majority of cases are still located in the Southwestern Public Health region, where almost half of the cases are reported, and neighbouring Grand Erie, which has almost 24 per cent. The outbreak has also been linked to rising measles cases in other parts of Canada, including Quebec and Alberta. ([cp24.com](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/20/ontario-sees-another-sharp-rise-in-measles-cases-while-outbreaks-grow-in-quebec-alberta/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.wechu.org/updates-alerts/public-health-update-clinicians-confirmed-measles-case-windsor-essex> - The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) has confirmed a measles case in the region and issued a public warning to anyone who may have been exposed to measles infection at various locations on multiple dates. This case is part of a multi-jurisdictional measles outbreak in Ontario, which has seen 91% of measles cases in 2025 resulting from exposures within Canada. As of February 26, 2025, 177 measles cases (127 confirmed, 50 probable) are associated with this outbreak, all in individuals born in or after 1970. The WECHU emphasizes the importance of vaccination and urges clinicians to be vigilant for measles cases. ([wechu.org](https://www.wechu.org/updates-alerts/public-health-update-clinicians-confirmed-measles-case-windsor-essex?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/05/01/ontario-sees-sharpest-rise-in-measles-yet-with-223-new-infections-since-last-week/> - Ontario is reporting its highest increase in measles cases since the outbreak began, with 223 new infections in the province over the past week. This brings the total number of people in the province who have fallen ill from the virus to 1,243 since October 2024. Public Health Ontario reported that 84 people have been hospitalized, including 63 children, during the course of this outbreak. Eight patients have been admitted to intensive care. The Southwestern Public Health Unit has had 57 new infections, compared to 15 the previous week. ([cp24.com](https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/05/01/ontario-sees-sharpest-rise-in-measles-yet-with-223-new-infections-since-last-week/?utm_source=openai))