COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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State Health Commissioner

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Declaration of Measles as a Communicable Disease of Public Health Threat for Virginia

Whereas, in Virginia between January 1 and October 20, 2026, 180 measles cases have been identified, including one community outbreak, representing a significant increase over the five cases reported in 2025 and one case reported in 2024; and

Whereas, measles cases in the United States have risen sharply in recent years, from 285 cases in 2024 to a record high of 2,288 cases in 2025, and 4,410 cases reported from January through October 15, 2026; and

Whereas, measles is one of the most contagious viral diseases and remains transmissible via airborne particles for up to two hours after an infected person leaves an enclosed space; and

Whereas, measles disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including infants, immunocompromised individuals, those who are pregnant, and unvaccinated communities; and

Whereas, measles may lead to serious health complications, including hospitalization of about one in five unvaccinated individuals, encephalitis in about one out of every 1,000 children who get measles, and death in nearly 1 to 3 of every 1,000 children who become infected with measles; and

Whereas, although safe and effective vaccines are accessible and play a critical role in protecting health, there is evidence of a national-level decline in the childhood measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccination rate between 2019 and 2024; and

Whereas, Virginia kindergarten MMR statewide vaccination rates for the 2025-26 school year were below 94% for the first time since the 2014-15 school year, with 28 localities with rates under 90%, including as low as 67.4%, and total statewide exemption rates reached 3% up from 1.1% in 2014-15 school year, with 23 localities with exemption rates above 5%, including as high as 17.6%; and

Whereas, there is no specific antiviral therapy that is Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved for treatment of measles, so medical care relies on supportive treatment to manage symptoms; and

Whereas, these features of virulence, transmissibility, and potential magnitude of the effect on the health and welfare of the public meet the criteria for Exceptional Circumstances as defined in 12VAC5-90-10; and

Whereas, isolation and quarantine can be necessary effective public health measures to control the spread of measles;

I hereby declare that measles is considered a Communicable Disease of Public Health Threat. Therefore, the provisions of §32.1-48.05 et seq. of the Code of Virginia may be invoked for public health investigations of persons known or suspected of being exposed to measles virus or known or suspected of being infected with measles virus, such that I may issue orders of isolation and/or quarantine as necessary and appropriate to control this disease in Virginia.

11/5/26

B. Cameron Webb, MD, JD
State Health Commissioner

Date

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