Respiratory Outlook 2025/26
Monthly Update

January 8, 2026

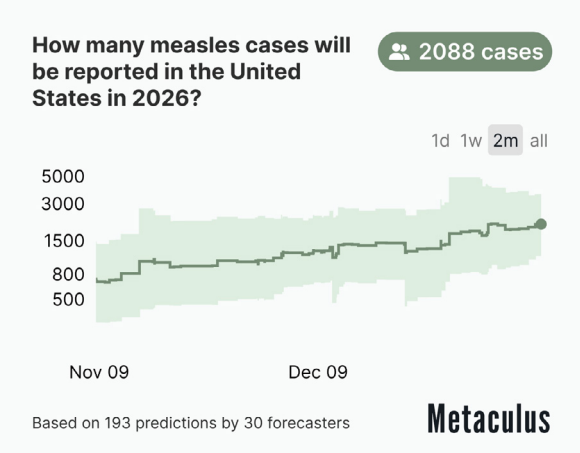
Key Takeaways

- **Metaculus forecasters have further raised their 2026 measles case estimates to 2,088** (50% prediction interval [1,166, 3,627]) **as cases show no sign of slowing down.**
- **Forecasters expect a strong flu season with a peak hospitalization rate of 10.7 per 100k and a 44% probability of High or Very High severity.**
- **Vaccination coverage estimates have increased for the flu across all categories.**

A Closer Look

Measles

Further increases in the number of measles cases in the US in December, along with the expectation that holiday gatherings will increase transmission, led forecasters to significantly revise their predictions to 2,088 cases (50% prediction interval [1,166, 3,627]) from 1,396.



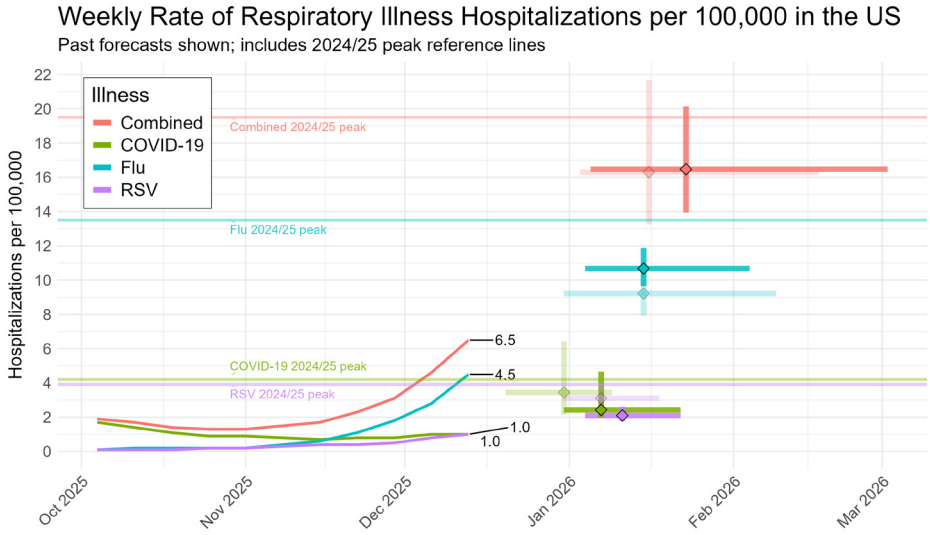
Influenza

Forecaster estimates for the percentage of influenza A in tested sequences remained stable over the last month (89.9% [82.7%, 93.2%]), while the proportion of influenza A cases that will be H3N2 saw a slight rise (87.7% [79.9%, 92.7%]). The expected number of H5 cases remains very low, at 0.1% of influenza A cases.

As the trajectory of the number of cases has mirrored previous High-severity seasons in the past couple of weeks, forecasters increased their estimates for the probability of an influenza season of High severity significantly (from 25% to 40%). However the probability of a Very High severity season rose only slightly, from 3.2% to 4%.

Peak Hospitalization and Timing Forecasts

As COVID-19 and RSV cases have remained significantly lower than previous years, forecasters have further reduced their estimates for peak hospitalizations, as well as the RSV hospitalization rates for the 0-4 years (18.2 [13.8, 29.4]) and 65 and above (4.6 [3.5, 6.0]) age groups. In contrast, flu hospitalization estimates have significantly increased, following the rapid rise of flu cases. Forecasts for the timing of the disease peaks have moved later by a few days, as early data preclude the possibility of early peaks.



Weekly hospitalization rates per 100,000 according to RESP-NET along with Metaculus forecasts for the peak hospitalization rate in the 2025-26 season and the associated timing. Diamonds reflect median forecasts for the magnitude and timing of the peak, vertical bars show 50% prediction intervals for the magnitude, and horizontal bars show 50% prediction intervals for the timing of the peak. Forecasts from last month (December 15) are shown with transparency. Horizontal lines indicate the peak from the 2024-25 season.

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Vaccinations

Vaccination coverage forecasts for influenza significantly increased, as December data did not confirm forecaster expectations of reduced coverage. RSV estimates also increased for infants, but remained stable for pregnant women and older adults. COVID-19 coverage estimates were further decreased for older adults, but have remained stable in children and all adults, as forecasters already expected low numbers.

Influenza	
Group	**Coverage**
Children 6m to 17y	**49.1% ↑** [47.3%, 51.1%] *47.3%* *[44.6%, 51.0%]*
Adults age 18+	**48.1% ↑** [46.5%, 49.8%] *46.9%* *[44.8%, 50.2%]*
Adults age 65+	**71.8% ↔** [70.1%, 73.8%] *71.0%* *[68.9%, 74.1%]*

COVID-19	
Group	**Coverage**
Children 6m to 17y	**10.5% ↔** [9.5%, 12.1%] *10.8%* *[9.3%, 13.2%]*
Adults age 18+	**20.1% ↔** [18.7%, 21.6%] *20.3%* *[18.0%, 21.9%]*
Adults age 65+	**39.0% ↓** [36.6%, 41.6%] *40.8%* *[38.1%, 43.8%]*

RSV	
Group	**Coverage**
Pregnant women age 18–49	**39.1% ↔** [36.8%, 41.6%] *39.8%* *[34.0%, 45.1%]*
Infants age <8m	**48.5% ↑** [43.7%, 52.9%] *47.2%* *[38.9%, 53.3%]*
Adults age 75+	**52.2% ↔** [47.7%, 57.8%] *53.1%* *[47.6%, 61.3%]*

This table displays the median and 50% prediction interval for vaccine coverage by age group for flu, COVID-19, and RSV, with values in italic representing the forecast from December 15.

Methodology

Metaculus develops forecasting programs to improve decision-making and public coordination on topics of global importance and operates one of the world's largest forecasting platforms. The Respiratory Outlook 2025/26 initiative is designed to harness the effectiveness of crowd forecasting for real-time decision-making, aiding public health officials in responding to ongoing epidemiological changes and better anticipating future conditions. Five Metaculus Pro Forecasters, among the most accurate forecasters on Metaculus, are contributing to the Respiratory Outlook 2025/26 initiative.