

March 16, 2026

## Key Takeaways

- Metaculus forecasters have raised their 2026 measles case estimates to 5,326 (50% prediction interval [3,925, 6,884]) as cases show no sign of slowing down.
- Forecasters have deemed COVID, influenza, and RSV hospitalizations as past their peaks, though RSV reached an early March magnitude of 3.5 new admissions per 100,000 people [3.2, 3.9] following a much later peak than in recent years.
- Emerging non-respiratory threats remain low-probability but monitored: forecasters put a 10% chance on local New World screwworm transmission and expect Clade I Mpox cases to roughly double to 25, with only a 5.7% chance of exceeding 100 cases in 2026.

## A Closer Look

### Measles

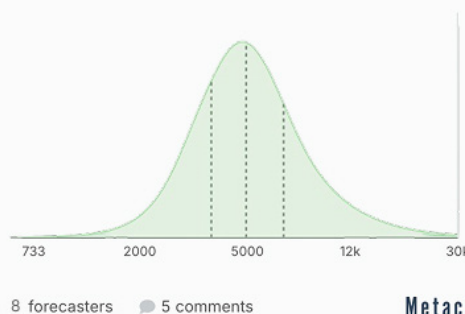
As the number of cases has increased to 1,281, Pro Forecasters have slightly revised their 2026 estimates upwards to 5,326 cases, with a 50% prediction interval of 3,925 to 6,884. At the same time, forecasters are taking into account the recent decline in new cases and estimate less than a 12% chance that total cases will exceed 10,000. Current hospitalizations stand at 5% of reported cases, significantly below last year's 11%. One forecaster suggested that this might partially reflect that hospitals in South Carolina are not required to report measles hospitalizations. Overall forecasters expect the hospitalization rate to increase to 9.0% (50% prediction interval [7.1%, 11.0%]) as the disease spreads to other states.

Forecasters predict a 60% chance the Pan American Health Organization will revoke the US's measles elimination status before 2027. The PAHO meeting was already postponed to November 2026 from April and forecasters believe that a further postponement, bureaucratic delays, or political pressure might result in the status not being revoked by the question deadline.

### Influenza

Forecasters estimate that both COVID and influenza have already peaked and are unlikely to experience a second wave. They assign a

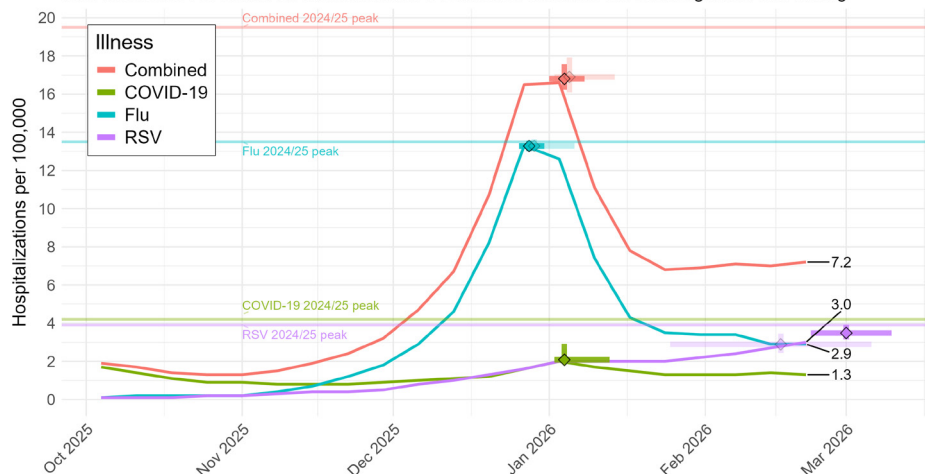
### How many measles cases will be reported in the United States in 2026?



Measles forecast includes Pros-only aggregate due to erroneous community forecasts.

### Weekly Rate of Respiratory Illness Hospitalizations per 100,000 in the US

With Metaculus Forecasts for Median and 50% Prediction Intervals of Peak Magnitude and Timing



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 (February 27) are shown with transparency. Horizontal lines indicate the peak from the 2024-25 season. COVID-19 magnitude forecasts have used the Pros-only aggregate due to erroneous community forecasts.

91.5% probability that the current flu season's severity will ultimately remain classified as moderate. They also expect the share of influenza A among tested samples to stabilize at slightly below current levels (80.9% [77.5%, 84.6%]) due to the rising number of influenza B cases during the end of the current wave. Forecasters further expect vaccination rates for both diseases to have mostly plateaued. The expected share of H5 cases remains very low, at <0.1% of influenza A cases.

### RSV

Forecasters were surprised by the continued rise of RSV, which is now expected to reach its peak hospitalization magnitude after mid-January for the first time in the past 10 years. They have adjusted their estimates accordingly and now expect a magnitude of 3.48 [3.15, 3.91] to have been reached on March 1 [February 22, March 10] based on current hospitalization trends and evidence from wastewater surveillance. Hospitalization rates for children 0-4 years are expected to peak at 23.1 [20.8, 24.5] and those of adults 65 years or older at 6.0 [5.3, 6.2]. Despite this unexpected increase, forecasters estimate that RSV vaccinations have also largely plateaued.

### Non respiratory diseases

Forecasters estimate that the total number of Clade I Mpox cases will double from 11 to 25, with a 50% prediction interval of 18 to 37. They assign a 5.7% probability to outbreaks pushing the total over 100 cases in 2026.

Forecasters also estimate that local transmission of New World screwworm, whether in humans or animals, is 10% likely. This reflects the fact that imported cases rarely result in onward transmission and the expectation that the new USDA prevention strategy will mitigate any risk of the local presence of the screwworm.

### 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.

