

Measles outbreak at Dilley concentration camp: An indictment of Trump's war on immigrants and public health

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A measles outbreak is now ripping through the Dilley Immigration Processing Center in South Texas, where the Trump administration confines hundreds of immigrant families and children under conditions of deliberate brutality and medical neglect. The outbreak, confirmed January 31 by the Texas Department of State Health Services, is a social crime committed by a fascist regime that treats human beings as disposable and public health as an obstacle to profit.

In a letter dated February 1 and addressed to Texas health officials, Dr. Lee C. Rogers, Chief of Podiatry at UT Health San Antonio, called for an “immediate, unified public health command-and-control” to stop the outbreak, warning that “congregate detention creates near-universal exposure risk” and that the outbreak “has the potential to quickly overwhelm local health resources.”

Rogers stressed that “any large-scale dispersal of exposed persons without a coordinated public health plan would materially increase the risk of multi-jurisdictional transmission.” He concluded, “Viruses are not political. They do not care about one’s immigration status. Measles will spread if we allow uncertainty and delay to substitute for reasoned public health action.”

Measles spreads through the air and can linger in a room for up to two hours after an infected person leaves. In crowded, poorly ventilated facilities where medical care is rationed such as at the Dilley detention center, a single case can ignite mass transmission. The conditions now exist for explosive spread among children, parents, workers and surrounding communities.

The Dilley center, run by the for-profit prison contractor CoreCivic, has a capacity of 2,400. It is the same facility where 5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos was held before his recent release home to Minneapolis. On January 24, a protest broke out at the facility, with hundreds shouting, “Let us out!” and “Liberty for the kids!” This was first made public by attorney Eric Lee, who represents the El Gamal family, which includes five children—two five-year-olds, a nine-year-old, a 16-year-old and an 18-year-old—who have been detained at Dilley for eight months, far exceeding the 20-day limit for child detention

under the Flores settlement.

In interviews following these protests, Lee described conditions inside Dilley, noting that baby formula is mixed with “putrid” water, food has “bugs in it,” and guards are “often verbally abusive.” When one of his clients with appendicitis collapsed in the hallway, he was initially denied treatment and told to “take a Tylenol and come back in three days.”

The Department of Homeland Security’s response to the measles outbreak at Dilley has been to issue empty statements through Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin, who claimed that ICE “immediately took steps to quarantine and control further spread” and that “all detainees are being provided with proper medical care.”

This statement is a blatant lie. The same apparatus that denies medical treatment to children with appendicitis and provides them with putrid water and food couldn’t care less about the health of those it incarcerates. The “lockdown” is a control measure designed to keep journalists, independent doctors and attorneys out while giving ICE full discretion to conceal illness and continue the neglect that created the outbreak. There is a growing danger that hundreds of children and their parents will be infected inside Dilley, and that some will die, with virtually nothing reported to the outside world.

The Dilley outbreak is unfolding amidst a national measles resurgence. In 2025, the US recorded 2,255 measles cases, the highest annual total since 1992, while two unvaccinated children succumbed to the disease. In January 2026 alone, 607 cases were confirmed. The largest outbreak is currently in South Carolina, where 847 cases have been confirmed, 813 of them in Spartanburg County.

Kindergarten vaccination coverage for measles, mumps and rubella has fallen to 92.5 percent nationally, below the 95 percent threshold required for herd immunity, with 39 states failing to meet this standard. Only 28 percent of US counties now maintain herd immunity, down from 50 percent before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 5.2 million kindergarten-aged children live in counties where vaccination rates have fallen below the protective threshold.

The nation's measles elimination status, maintained since 2000, is now in jeopardy. Dr. Demetre C. Daskalakis, a former CDC official who resigned amid the Trump administration's mass purges last year, warned that the US public health system is "about to code" and stated bluntly: "We do not have the capability to actually control measles. I'm going to say that elimination is already lost."

The Trump administration, above all Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Robert F. Kennedy Jr., bears central responsibility for this catastrophe. For decades, Kennedy has played a major role in spreading anti-vaccine disinformation. As HHS director, last year Kennedy purged all 17 members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the first time in the committee's 61-year history its entire membership has been dismissed. He fired CDC Director Susan Monarez after she refused to pre-approve anti-vaccine recommendations and, most recently, revised the childhood vaccine schedule at the start of January to no longer recommend universal vaccination for influenza, COVID-19, rotavirus, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and meningococcal disease.

Under the banner of "Make America Healthy Again," the Trump administration has fired more than 20,000 scientists and public health workers from HHS, dissolved the CDC's Global Health Center, and scrubbed thousands of pages of scientific information from government websites.

These policies mark a deepening and broadening of the bipartisan assault on public health throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which began under the first Trump administration and escalated under Biden. In total, over 1.5 million Americans have now died from COVID-19 or its aftereffects, while Long COVID continues to impact tens of millions.

The measles outbreak at Dilley concentrates many of the main features of the Trump administration's fascist program: the expansion of the police-state apparatus and ICE terror gangs, the erection of a network of modern-day concentration camps, the subordination of human life to profit, and the destruction of all public health protections. The imprisonment of immigrant families under increasingly barbaric conditions is inseparable from the global crisis of capitalism—the wars, economic plunder and climate disruption that have displaced tens of millions, whom the imperialist powers then criminalize and cage.

But the working class cannot rely on the Democratic Party, which has continuously enabled the expansion of the detention regime and the destruction of public health. The Dilley child detention center was built under the Obama administration in 2014 and operated for most of the Biden administration. Today, as ICE agents prowl the streets of Minneapolis and murder innocent civilians including Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, the Democrats are working with Trump to suppress opposition and ensure the ongoing funding of the repressive state apparatus.

The necessary response must come from below through the

independent mobilization of workers in every industry and every country. Already, there are countless signs of a developing movement among workers and youth across the United States, with two rounds of mass protests across the country in January following the murders of Good and Pretti and growing support for a general strike. Neighborhood committees are beginning to form in Minneapolis and across the US, serving as critical means of communication and organization.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the expansion of these neighborhood committees and the building of a network of rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace, to unify with workers globally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). This network of committees, organized independently of the corporate-controlled union bureaucracies and the entire political establishment, must advance the following demands:

- All immigrant detention centers, including Dilley, must be closed immediately, with those released free to live and work where they please.
- A massive public health program must be launched to test everyone at Dilley, in the surrounding community, and wherever measles is currently spreading in the US, with patients safely isolated and treated.
- Vast resources must be provided to vaccinate all those eligible for the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), COVID-19, influenza and other vaccines essential for public health, both in the US and internationally.
- All ICE operations, detentions, deportations and the criminalization of migration must end now.

The fight to stop the measles outbreak at Dilley, defend the right to asylum, and halt the Trump administration's war on science is inseparable from the fight for socialism. Public health and democratic rights cannot be defended within a system that subordinates every social need to private profit and state repression. The task before the working class is to take up this fight consciously and internationally, building the political leadership necessary to put an end to capitalism and establish a society based on economic planning and with the aim of providing for human needs, not the wealth of oligarchs.



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