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Measles outbreak prompts call for vaccine renewal

20 cases at Ave Maria University in Collier County

Mary Lett

Pensacola News Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

If you've never had measles or been vaccinated against the infectious disease, now is the time to get immunized, doctors urge.

The recommendation follows on the

heels of a reported case of measles in Escambia County of a high school-aged child. It is the first reported case in the county in at least 20 years. The Florida Department of Health does not report cases in real time, but local doctors have been notified of the case, they said.

Escambia's case is one of a burgeoning problem in Florida, which is experi-

encing a rare outbreak of the virus. A measles outbreak on the campus of Ave Maria University in Collier County stands at 20 cases in the latest tally of the week-old outbreak, according to a clinic conducting testing in the community.

Ave Maria has not responded to media inquiries since the outbreak began and Florida Department of Health's reportable disease website has not been

updated since Jan. 24. That means a complete picture of Collier's confirmed case count for measles is not available.

A handful of one-off cases in Hillsborough, Manatee, St. Johns and Duval counties have also been reported.

Unvaccinated children are at risk of getting measles, but so are other people who are not vaccinated or who have

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Intric Pensacola Police Chief Kristin Brown welcomes Eric Winstrom into the department following the Mayor's introduction of Winstrom as the new Chief on Feb. 4. PHOTOS BY TONY GIBERSON/PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

Building trust in department, city No. 1 task for police chief

Jim Little

Pensacola News Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

When Eric Winstrom boarded his flight from Michigan earlier this week, the temperature was 14 degrees and there was a foot of snow on the ground.

But Winstrom, the nominee to be Pensacola's next police chief, said it wasn't the warmer climate that drew him to our city.

"There's something special going on in Pensacola," Winstrom said.

Winstrom won't start as the next chief of the Pensacola Police Department until March 2, if confirmed by the City Council later this month, but he made his first public introduction at City Hall on Feb. 4.

Winstrom has been the chief of police in Grand Rapids, Michigan, since 2022 and, before that, served in various leadership roles at the Chicago Police

Department for 21 years. Before he became a police officer, he was an attorney in the New York Police Department's Legal Affairs Bureau.

During his time as chief of the Grand Rapids Police Department, Winstrom oversaw rewrites of use-of-force policies as well as updated training requirements that focus on the "sanctity for human life" in all interactions, according to local Michigan news reports.

Winstrom also oversaw the implementation of a co-responder model with the department having three trained social workers respond with police officers on calls when someone is facing a potential mental health crisis. PPD implemented a similar model in 2023.

Pensacola Mayor D.C. Reeves selected Winstrom because he has a proven track record of coming in as an external

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Eric Winstrom, the new police chief for the Pensacola Police Department, speaks with members of the media during the Mayor's weekly press conference on Feb. 4.

Bayou Chico boat dumping leads to new Florida bill

Mollye Barrows

Pensacola News Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Escambia County is pushing for a new state law that will make it easier to remove derelict vessels.

It's a problem statewide but Escambia staff is leading the effort for legal change particularly because Bayou Chico is a "dumping ground" for derelict boats.

From sailboats to motorboats to house boats, the county is constantly identifying abandoned and dilapidated vessels for removal in Bayou Chico, as many as a dozen or more a year.

"On any given day, you could go out into Bayou Chico, and you could see probably a half dozen derelict vessels that are in either just totally abandoned or they're sinking or they're starting to sink. It's just a constant problem," Escambia County Natural Resources Director Chips Kirschenfeld said.

The ongoing problem creates eyesores, environmental hazards and is expensive to clean up.

An average-sized boat, about 25 to 30 feet, can cost upward of \$10,000 to extract from the bayou and haul off for disposal. Those costs can go up or down depending on the size of the vessel and if it's submerged.

The county covers the pricey cost of removal with the help of state funds from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), but county staff say they could save time and money with the help of a new bill that they say will make the process of identifying and removing the vessels more efficient and cost effective.

"The goal is if we can pull them out before they sink, one, it's far less money for the tax dollars it takes to clean these up, and two, it's a proactive way to help protect our waterways," Escambia Natural Resources Deputy Director Tim Day said. "This year looks like the bill has a very good chance of having traction and making good things happen here."

Both Day and Kirschenfeld testified before state legislators the last week in January 2026 to discuss why the proposed law is needed to address the problem.

Currently, dealing with derelict vessels falls under the jurisdiction of law enforcement like FWC. However, due to more pressing criminal complaints, problem vessels are not a top priority.

The proposed legislation empowers

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