

## First cases of measles are reported in Cass County

FARGO — The North Dakota Health and Human Services Department said two measles cases have been reported in Cass County, the first to be recorded in eastern North Dakota.

Human services said both cases are unvaccinated individuals who contracted the disease through international travel. One of them is hospitalized.

The health and human services department said members of the public who were at two Essentia Health locations in West Fargo and Fargo may

have been exposed. Exposure may have occurred at the Essentia Health Clinic, 3150 Sheyenne St., Ste. 240, West Fargo, between 2:30 and 6 p.m. on Wednesday, May 7, or between 5:30 and 6 p.m., Friday, May 9, at the Essentia Health Walk-in Care, 52nd Avenue, 4110 51st Ave. S, Fargo.

The two new cases bring the total cases reported in the state to 11. The Cass County cases are not believed to be related to the nine cases recently reported near Williston, in Williams County. The first case was

reported Friday, May 2, when the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services said an unvaccinated child from Williams County contracted the virus, likely during an out-of-state visit. The number jumped to nine by Friday, May 9. Four of the individuals were contagious while inside three different Williston schools.

Individuals who have not received a dose of the measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine should quarantine, or stay home, and monitor for symptoms for 21 days.

Those who have been exposed but are vaccinated do not need to quarantine. However, the department of health and human services said they should still monitor for symptoms for 21 days after exposure.

Measles is a highly contagious, viral illness that can be fatal, particularly for young children and those with compromised immune systems. Measles spreads through the air and can remain in a room and on surfaces for up to two hours, sometimes even traveling between floors through ventilation

systems. Measles symptoms often include a fever, cough, runny nose or eye irritation followed by a body-wide rash. Measles spreads easily through the air and remains contagious for several days before and after symptoms appear.

There is no specific medical treatment for measles, antibiotics may be used in cases with a developed secondary bacterial infection.

According to the state health department, most North Dakotans are vaccinated against measles,

and the risk to the general public is low. People who were vaccinated as children and adults born before 1957 are considered protected due to previous infection.

“The MMR vaccine is 93% effective after one dose and 97% effective after two doses,” Molly Howell, state immunization director, said in a statement. “People who are vaccinated and exposed to measles are not likely to develop the disease. MMR vaccination is critical to

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Alyssa Goelzer / The Forum

Nature Conservancy Director of Science Marissa Ahlering gets a closer look at some plants on Thursday at Bluestem Prairie Scientific and Natural Area.

## OUT IN THE BLUE

Bluestem Prairie near Glyndon part of 1M acres protected by The Nature Conservancy

BY INGRID HARBO  
The Forum

GLYNDON, MINN.

The first signs of spring are emerging on the Bluestem Prairie. Close to the ground, white, yellow and pink flowers are starting to bloom. Some insects float from flower to flower, while an occasional ground squirrel rustles the dry tall grasses. Even early in the year, there's more to the prairie than meets the eye from afar. As Marissa Ahlering walks through, she said it has been her lifelong work to get people

excited about prairies. “It is so hard to appreciate a prairie from the road,” Ahlering said. “You really have to get out in it.” Ahlering is the director of science for The Nature Conservancy's Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota chapter. The international conservation organization owns the Bluestem Prairie Preserve, 6,000 acres of prairie near Glyndon, Minn., about a 30-minute drive from Moorhead. Much of the land is remnant prairie, or original prairie that has never been developed or plowed over for agriculture.



Alyssa Goelzer / The Forum

A black blister beetle crawls on a pasqueflower on Thursday at Bluestem Prairie Scientific and Natural Area.

The land is a small part of the total land the regional chapter of The Nature Conservancy has protected. Across Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, the organization has protected 1 million acres of land.

The mission of the organization is to “conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends,” Ahlering said. The organization purchases land to conserve or to restore natural

PRAIRIE on A6

## Cases dismissed

ND cases against accused online child predator come to ‘reluctant’ end

BY TASHA CARVELL  
The Forum

RAY, N.D. — In the summer of 2022, investigators at the Williams County Sheriff's Department in northwest North Dakota received a tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Several horrific images involving young children had allegedly been uploaded from an IP address associated with a device at a home in the town of Ray, population 750.

On August 19, 2022, law enforcement carried out search warrants at Gary Donnelly's residence based on the cybertip that indicated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) would be found at that address, according to court documents. Donnelly shared the home with his wife Misty and their two teenage sons.

Later, an affidavit of probable cause said, Williams County Detective Derek Bernier conducted a forensic data extraction of a hard drive found on a laptop during that search. It revealed 28 images of suspected CSAM, some involving children as young as toddlers and babies, court documents said.

Three days later, Donnelly, 57, was arrested and charged with seven counts of distribution and possession of prohibited materials. Fifteen months later, on November 9, 2023, another case was filed against Donnelly, this time charging him with 100 more counts of possession of CSAM. According to the affidavit in the second case, more

than 6,000 images of CSAM were found on Donnelly's computer. At a March 2024 preliminary hearing, Donnelly's attorney Elizabeth Pendlay argued that the computer where the CSAM was found was used by all members of the family, and the state couldn't prove that Donnelly was responsible for the material. She called Donnelly's wife, Misty, to the stand, who testified that one of her teenage sons admitted to her that he had downloaded child pornography on a dare at one point, and that both boys had admitted to searching for pornography using the computer. “Those are the culprits,” Pendlay said in her closing argument at the hearing, referring to Donnelly's sons. “What we're looking at here, Your Honor, is a couple of reckless teenagers.” But Assistant State's Attorney Nathan Madden claimed to have text messages proving that Donnelly's wife and sons were out of town and Donnelly home alone at the time some of the CSAM searches had taken place at the home. In addition, Madden said, the state had evidence showing that the searches for CSAM started in 2018, when the oldest boy was just 10 years old, making it unlikely the boys were responsible for the illicit content. During that preliminary hearing, prosecutors referenced evidence from a forensic examination report. Pendlay noted that the defense had yet to receive and review that evidence, despite having made discovery requests in both cases. A discovery request is the procedure by which a party to a case asks to see the evidence upon which the charges against them is based, which can

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## West Fargo Public Library remains popular spot

Library sets records in number of visitors, items checked out

BY WENDY REUER  
The Forum

WEST FARGO — A few weeks ago, West Fargo Library Director Jenna Kahly was approached by a West Fargo man in his 70s. The man had never used a computer, and he needed to look for a job online. Kahly helped the man navigate the Internet on the library's public computers, and before long, the man was able to not just surf the online job postings, but he found a few places to land and

had even submitted applications. The incident was not unusual for the West Fargo Public Library, as it provides regular technology tutoring to patrons, which has become one of its most popular services. And although the library offers an array of digital and technology services, from classes to ebooks, it's still the centuries-old custom of printed items that remains the true draw. “You might think that everyone is on their

phones, everyone is using our digital items, yet physical items still remain supreme,” Kahly said. Kahly presented the 2024 annual report to the West Fargo City Commission on Monday, May 5. She said the library continued to set record numbers from attendance to class participation. The library issued 4,113 new library cards in 2024 and served 60,701 visitors, a record for visitors. Overall visitor numbers have increased by 39% since 2021.

There were 73,966 digital items and 161,788 physical items (such as books and magazines) checked out in 2024. Kahly estimated West Fargo residents saved about \$3.5 million by checking out items rather than buying. The number of book clubs also continues to expand, Kahly said. “If you were to go out in the street and ask residents what kind of programs they would see in the library, they would



Chris Flynn / The Forum

Librarians Aaron Thostenson, right, and Amy Hitch at the new West Fargo Library satellite location inside West Fargo City Hall on its opening day on March 18.

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