Safeguarding our community's health

Tarrant County Public Health

2004 Annual Report

Safeguarding our Community's Health

Tarrant County Public Health

2004 Annual Report
Tarrant County Public Health (TCPH) is a small group of people, but a small group reaching out to other small groups of people makes a world of difference. 2004 was a year of successful community partnerships and collaborations. Once again, our Environmental Health staff worked with 29 municipalities in the county to prevent the transmission of West Nile virus. Only five human cases were confirmed for the year.

Our staff teamed up with the community-based TEAM Health to sponsor the first Health Disparities Summit and the ensuing Access to Health Care forum, which provided a dialogue on issues for hospitals and community members. More than 140 people participated. In addition, TCPH participated actively in Catholic Charities’ ongoing Infant Mortality Summit action workgroups and promoted policy development for the establishment of a Fetal Infant Mortality Review.

We provided leadership in the United Way vision for a FitFuture for Tarrant County. Community planning to increase physical activity and good nutrition were emphasized through the efforts of a multi-partner consortium convened by TCPH. We continued to provide screening, education and awareness regarding hypertension through our partnership with the Healthy Tarrant County Coalition.

With another unusual flu season due to the early predictions of a shortage of vaccine, we worked with many partners to ensure that those at greatest risk received the vaccine. TCPH staff worked with private providers, nursing homes, hospitals, governmental agencies and vaccine distributors to inventory the local supply and connect those who had more than enough to those who needed more. Our emergency preparedness plan was tested as we opened locations across the county and fine-tuned vaccinating hundreds of people in a matter of hours.

We conducted two major public health preparedness exercises, including a smallpox exercise in Mansfield and the nationally-spotlighted Texas Motor Speedway event in November. The after-action reports from both have assisted us and our partners in training and planning for an improved response.

Tarrant County Public Health continues to build new partnerships. We gladly serve as leaders for some activities and enthusiastic participants in others. We are a small group of public health professionals striving to make a difference for Tarrant County.

The Best in Health,

Lou Kelley Brewer
Director, Tarrant County Public Health
**Elvin Adams named Medical Director, Health Authority**

Dr. Elvin Adams recently took on new duties at TCPH. Previously, he worked in our Preventive Medicine Clinic. Dr. Adams received his medical degree from Loma Linda University in Southern California and his Masters of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University. Internal medicine is his specialty, and he was in private practice in Burleson before joining TCPH in 1999.

One of Dr. Adams’ roles is to monitor and assure the quality of medical services provided in the department’s various clinics that provide direct client services.

As the Health Authority for the county, he has special responsibilities. In the event of a naturally-occurring or terrorist-inflicted epidemic, various control measures would need to be established. In order to protect the public, isolation or quarantine of people, buildings, areas, animals or common carriers may need to be instituted. The Health Authority, acting in consultation with representatives of the medical, political and business communities, is authorized to issue these restrictive orders under unusual circumstances.

At times, peace officers or emergency medical service personnel are exposed to blood from a victim whose HIV and hepatitis status are not known, and the individual refuses to allow testing. The Health Authority can order diagnostic tests to be performed so that city or county personnel can take appropriate protective measures.

The national threat of bioterrorism has resulted in significant changes in the practice of public health. Tarrant County Public Health is on the forefront of these changes.

If a bioterrorism event occurs in Tarrant County, local physicians are likely to see the first case in an emergency room or doctor’s office. Public Health depends on physicians to inform us in a timely manner so measures can be instituted to protect the public.

On a daily basis, Dr. Adams is mindful of the fact that physicians see patients one at a time and protect their individual health, while public health looks at the health status of the citizens of Tarrant County in all 41 cities and towns.
Testing the region’s preparedness and response

TCPH had the opportunity to participate in several functional exercises, drills and tabletop exercises throughout the year. Two of the projects were organized by the department.

In August, a drill was held to test Public Health’s preparedness to administer the smallpox vaccine. The goal was to test the skill and expediency of staff in administering mass quantities of the smallpox vaccine. The activity was a good simulation of the possible rush and anxiety, the paperwork, and the assistance and cooperation required. Lessons learned were used to conduct a large-scale exercise in November.

If terrorists use a weapon of mass destruction to kill and frighten spectators at a major sports venue, how well would the region respond? To answer this question, in November, Public Health organized a full-scale exercise at Texas Motor Speedway that involved more than 2,500 volunteers, in excess of 40 participating agencies and more than 30 area hospitals. The ground-breaking exercise represented the first time that a mass casualty incident was simulated at a National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) facility. It successfully dramatized the terror that would be caused by numerous injuries and fatalities.

The simulated scenario, a mock “dirty bomb” delivered by a small high-speed aircraft on a typical race day with more than 200,000 fans in attendance, was a valuable learning tool for the first responders, hospitals and government agencies that participated.

Health Tip: Hand washing
A new study by infection control specialists at the University of North Carolina hospital confirms the best way to get germs off your hands is with soap and water. Researchers tested 14 hand hygiene agents against specific bacteria and viruses applied to the hands of 62 adult volunteers. Soap and water were shown to be the most effective. Among the viruses removed are those that cause the common cold, hepatitis A, gastrointestinal problems and a host of other illnesses.

Source:
“Comparative efficacy of hand hygiene agents in the reduction of bacteria and viruses”
American Journal of Infection Control, Volume 33, Issue 2, March 2005, Pages 67-77

Project Public Health Ready
TCPH was one of 11 local health departments nationwide to receive certification from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). The certification represents months of work to develop a preparedness plan, a staff education assessment, training and an exercise and after-action plan. Nine core competencies were developed by the Columbia University School of Nursing under contract to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The entire TCPH staff completed the training and demonstrated more than 90 percent competency on the posttest. As a result of this pilot effort, more than 30 local health departments, including several in Texas, have entered the second year of the certification process.

Community involvement important to preparedness
In Tarrant County, the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) strengthens communities by positioning medical, public health and other volunteers to offer their expertise throughout the year as well as during local emergencies and other times of community need. MRC volunteers work in coordination with existing local emergency response programs and also supplement existing community public health initiatives, like outreach and prevention, immunization programs, blood drives, case management, care planning and other efforts.

In 2004, the MRC recruited 434 volunteers and more volunteers are needed. MRC staff participated in local preparedness events, made numerous community presentations and distributed more than 1,000 volunteer application packets.
There is an ongoing need for physician and other volunteers who would help assist with the sick or injured in a disaster or an emergency.

**Managing an unusual flu season**

What started off as a business-as-usual flu season quickly changed when one of the two flu vaccine makers’ vaccine supplies was deemed unusable. Following state and federal guidelines, Public Health only administered the vaccine to people who met certain high-risk criteria. People who are normally healthy were asked to forgo getting the shot. To meet the high demand [and get to the high-risk people] with its limited supply, Public Health held flu shot events throughout the county.

TCPH became a clearinghouse as it worked to collect data about available local supplies. The data was then used to help connect organizations that had surplus vaccine with those who needed it for high-risk individuals.

Nearly 21,000 doses of flu vaccine were distributed directly to Tarrant County residents as well as to providers and facilities that care for high-risk populations.

**Sister Cities Project**

Public Health and the community benefit from our involvement in the Fort Worth Sister Cities Project with Bandung, Indonesia. The exchange allowed us to create a path of two-way travel between Tarrant County and a country that needs our help to better prepare for disasters and emergencies. Bandung delegates visited Tarrant County to learn about what we do. Public Health provided Bandung delegates with training in public health preparedness, including surveillance and response and communication technology, like our Health Alert Network. Our Tarrant County delegate also had an opportunity to visit Bandung to see how they have been able to incorporate their U.S. training and experience into their emergency operations. Key relationships have evolved and a bond is in place that will promote continued cooperation.

**Public health, homelessness**

Public Health’s involvement with the Mayor’s Committee on Homelessness intensifies our commitment to safeguard the community’s health. The troubles of homeless individuals are at the core of many health maladies. Through research, the committee learned that over the course of a year, approximately 8,600 people drop in and out of homelessness in Fort Worth and Tarrant County. Public Health’s role will be important toward addressing the objectives of the 10-year plan designed to improve the plight of the homeless. For starters, TCPH recommends continued ongoing tuberculosis screening with chest x-rays, and TB identification cards with follow-up medical evaluation and treatment for people at homeless shelters. Public Health also will offer guidance and information to help address the issue of sexually transmitted diseases and the homeless population.
Safeguarding travelers here and abroad

The Travel Health Services clinic helps to safeguard the community’s health by providing destination information, health and safety measures and travel immunizations to people traveling internationally. The clinic began as a part-time operation in 1994 and has since evolved into a full-time clinic in Fort Worth and satellite clinics in Southlake and Arlington. Clinic nurses also provide the hepatitis B vaccine monthly to students at Remington College and administer the hepatitis A vaccine several times a year to food service employees at DFW International Airport. Client numbers have grown steadily. In fiscal year 1998/1999 the clinic provided services to 3,749 clients. Since then, there has been a 51 percent increase to 5,663 people served in fiscal year 2003/2004.

North Texas Regional Laboratory

The consumer microbiology section during the last year provided water bacteriology testing services to 429 public drinking water systems, 1,294 private individuals and 50 bottled/vended water producers from the North Central Texas Region. This lab section also tested, on average, 244 raw bulk milk samples from dairy farms in the region each month. Two hundred eighty-eight retail milk products also were tested every month from 12 local dairy plants, 14 single service container plants and 19 frozen dessert manufacturers.

**HEALTH TIP:**

**Fitness**

Make it a daily challenge to find ways to move your body. Climb stairs if given a choice between that and escalators or elevators. Walk your dog; chase your kids; toss balls with friends, mow the lawn. Anything that moves your limbs is not only a fitness tool, it’s a stress buster. Think ‘move’ in small increments of time. It doesn’t have to be an hour in the gym or a 45-minute aerobic dance class or tai chi or kickboxing. But that’s great when you’re up to it. Meanwhile, move more.

Source: From “Health & Fitness Tips” Web site:
http://www.health-fitness-tips.com/features/10-essential-health-tips.htm

The bioterrorism response and emerging agents section participated in the West Nile Virus Mosquito Surveillance Program by testing 445 mosquito pools during the period of May through October 2004. Of the 445 mosquito pools that were tested, 21 were confirmed positive for West Nile virus. This lab section also is preparing to respond to new and emerging diseases such as SARS, avian influenza and pandemic influenza.

FitFuture paves the way

Public Health’s role goes beyond the day-to-day monitoring of the community’s health status. We also take an active role in partnering and guiding efforts that improve the quality of life for Tarrant County residents. Through our involvement and support of FitFuture activities, we provide leadership and promote healthy lifestyles to combat the growth of obesity in Tarrant County.

Our commitment expanded when our Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention (CDIP) division received a United Way grant for $71,000 in 2004. The funds are being used to establish a network development to include at least 250 participants; complete a Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey to include obesity data and coordinate an annual obesity and fitness symposium and conduct outreach and awareness efforts to targeted segments of the community. At its core, FitFuture is an obesity and fitness initiative that plans to reduce the percentage of overweight and obese individuals in Tarrant County by 10 percent by 2010.

United Way volunteers and workers enter Tarrant County Public Health to present a grant check to fund FitFuture activities.
Obesity, fitness efforts enhance FitFuture
At the beginning of the year, TCPH partnered with United Way to host the Obesity Symposium and develop objectives for the five plan areas identified in the FitFuture community plan. More than 350 BMI (body mass index) calculations were provided over the course of the year at events like Arlington’s Day of Wellness. When November arrived, CDIP turned inward to focus on Public Health’s staff. A pilot wellness program for employees was initiated. The 30-day event provided points for employees who participated in wellness activities such as aerobic classes, walking, educational programs and weight lifting. Walking paths were outlined at our main campus to allow employees to document distances walked throughout the day. The participation and activity data will be used to make necessary modifications that will help begin a permanent employee program in 2005.

Health disparity concerns take center stage
Barriers to health care plague many minorities, and until the issues are addressed, Public Health will continue to partner and work toward closing the gap for minorities. Our 2004 efforts were highlighted when April was proclaimed “Health Disparities” month in Tarrant County by Commissioners Court. The month was kicked off with a presentation by Nick Curry, MD, MPH – Deputy Commissioner for Prevention, Preparedness and Regulatory Services at the Department of State Health Services. He spoke on the issues of disparities in Texas and current efforts at the state level. The month culminated with the community’s first Health Disparities Summit, held April 23, 2004. Efforts continued in August when Tarrant Empowerment Association for Minority Health [TEAM Health] held its first Access to Health Care forum. The event provided local hospitals a forum to discuss ways in which they address access issues and their impact on minority populations.

Additional highlights
Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention
The Chronic Disease division actively participated or planned more than 90 projects, programs, initiatives, health fairs and symposiums highlighting chronic diseases and health disparities. In 2004, the focus was on cardiovascular disease, infant mortality, diabetes and obesity. Staff facilitated health screenings for more than 1,050 clients, coordinated or conducted 70 health events or classes, and distributed more than 8,600 pieces of literature related to chronic disease prevention while actively participating in 21 community health initiatives or committees.

Tarrant County Pertussis cases
Public Health has experienced a highly variable number of pertussis, commonly called whooping cough, cases from 2001 to 2004. Roughly two-thirds of the 71 cases in 2004 occurred among infants younger than 1 year of age. This results in part because often children are exposed when they are too young to be vaccinated, or the infants have an incomplete vaccination history. Exposure also may occur if they are around adults with waning immunity or recent immigrant residents who were not vaccinated in childhood. For all of the cases, TCPH ensures that all close contacts and household members receive the appropriate preventive treatment. Tarrant County also works closely with area schools to provide information and immunizations. For Tarrant County case rates from 2001 to 2004, see the table on page 11.
Southwest Center for Advanced Public Health Practice

In addition to the November disaster exercise, the Advanced Practice Center, working with Public Health’s epidemiology division, developed and continues to deploy a metroplex-wide automated syndromic surveillance network. The network will monitor, detect and send alerts based on early signs and symptoms of possible disease outbreaks or public health threats that could attack a population area “under the radar” of conventional disease and diagnostic reporting systems. Such outbreaks could be caused by the intentional release of terrorist-related chemical or biological agents or from the accidental release of other naturally-occurring or man-made chemical or biological agents.

The system also will monitor other health status parameters such as over-the-counter medication sales, and eventually it will monitor school absenteeism, clinic visits and even veterinary data. The primary objective of such a system when fully realized will be to save precious days or hours in the early response to any outbreak. This will allow public health and health care providers to quickly prepare and activate resources and assets that will ultimately reduce morbidity and mortality in a widespread public health emergency. The system has been deployed across 18 area hospitals within Tarrant, Dallas, Collin, Denton and several neighboring counties, and data is being continuously reported in both real-time and batch mode to surveillance computers at Tarrant County Public Health.

**Health Tip:**

**Air quality**

The best way to prevent the harmful effects of air pollution is to avoid exposure. You can reduce your risk by reducing “prolonged” and “heavy exertion” during elevated pollution events. Prolonged exertion is any activity that occurs over several hours and requires you to breathe slightly harder than normal. Reducing prolonged exertion could mean reducing the time you spend on such activities. You can also reduce your risk by cutting back on heavy exertion or any activity that causes you to breathe hard. This might mean walking instead of jogging, jogging for half your usual time, or staying indoors. To get current air quality information to plan your day, visit EPA’s AirNow web page.

**Sam Adamie, R.S., E.T.C.**

**Environmental Health**

Tarrant County was awarded 2004 Employer of the Year by the North Texas Clean Air Coalition (Fort Worth Transportation Authority Service Area, Over 500 Employees). This was accomplished through health department staff working with the different departments of Tarrant County government. By supporting alternative commute solutions and other strategies, we were able to make a significant contribution to help reduce air pollution in the metroplex.

**Adult Health Services**

The Adult Health Services (AHS) division is responsible for the identification, treatment and follow up of all cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV, in Tarrant County. In 2004, the AHS surveillance unit received 11,000 reports of positive test results from 683 physician offices and clinics and 29 hospital and private laboratories. Disease intervention specialists interviewed individuals diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection. Approximately 2,691 investigational interviews were conducted to obtain information to locate individuals exposed to a sexually transmitted disease. AHS personnel also tested 9,500 individuals for syphilis and HIV.

**Community Health Promotion**

More than 50,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women and children from birth to age 5 received nutrition assessment, nutrition education and nutritious foods at 20 locations to help improve their health status. Nutrition education was offered in a variety of ways, including individual counseling, facilitated discussion groups, placing nutrition books in public libraries and offering Internet-based nutrition lessons.

**Health Policy Forum**

Public Health served as a core partner to develop a statewide forum, *Public Health in Texas: The Hidden Crisis*, held in January. The forum brought together more than 15 state and local partners, elected officials, public health agencies and citizen advocacy groups interested in fostering policy recommendations to improve
the health of Texans. A similar forum is offered every other year, during the Texas Legislature’s intersession, and plans are underway for the 2006 event. The forums promote an understanding of the public health priorities of legislative policy makers, examine the vision and expectations of elected officials for the state’s public health system, and build effective relationships among public health leaders and state and local elected officials.

Teens Videofest
The program continues to grow from 33 entries in 1999 to 106 entries in 2004. Teen VideoFest challenges area youth 13-19 to produce videos on aspects of teen health. These videos provide a perspective on health issues affecting teens. In 2004, NACCHO added Teen VideoFest to its online resources and Fort Worth Community Cable Television partnered with TCPH to produce a new series called Teens Take on Health. The series focuses on teen health issues using Teen VideoFest videos from 2001 – 2005. The success of the Teen VideoFest program has simultaneously proved beneficial for the expansion of the indexed video lending library. The library, available to the community, has videos on a variety of teen health issues. DVDs will be added. A reference guide explains the lending and purchase process for the videos.

Awards and recognitions
Public health projects recognized nationally, internationally
Two Tarrant County programs were the only ones in Texas, among 29 others nationwide, to receive a Model Practice Award from NACCHO. Public Health’s West Nile Virus Surveillance Program and Tuberculosis Elimination’s screening program for a local homeless shelter were each recognized and acknowledged as a public health program, resource or tool that demonstrates exemplary and replicable qualities in response to a local public health need.

Winners were selected from a group of applicants representing 79 public health agencies. All of the winners are part of a new searchable online database of successful public health practices. It can be found on the NACCHO Web site: www.naccho.org/model-practices.

The West Nile Virus Surveillance Program also received a Best Practice Award from the Texas Association of Counties (TAC) Leadership Foundation. The award, one of five given to Tarrant County, was noted for superior innovation in health and human services.

Manager of the Year – 2004
Doug Fabio – Health Planning and Policy
Doug leads by example. He puts the needs of the organization and its employees first. He has a knack for getting others to work together effectively on projects and committee activities. Doug’s outstanding organizational skills and methodical approach ensure that key projects are completed on time, and often ahead of schedule. His patience, kindness and dedication make him an outstanding manager. Doug also was named Employee of the Quarter for the third quarter of 2004.
**Health Tip: Good Nutrition**

Make healthy food choices that fit into your lifestyle. Set goals and take control. Eat a variety of nutrient-rich foods while watching your portion sizes. Enjoy healthy, flavorful foods following the Food Guide Pyramid. Choose dark green, red, orange and yellow vegetables, delicious seasonal fruits, healthy high-fiber grains, lean meats and low-fat dairy foods. Be sensible in your choices, balancing the food you eat with physical activity for your overall good health.

*Dee Bash*

**WIC Nutrition Education Coordinator**

---

**Employees of the Quarter – 2004**

**Jennifer Self – HIV Services Administrative Agency**

Jennifer goes the extra mile to help out whenever she is needed. In addition to her other duties, Jennifer volunteered to assume the duties of HIV Insurance Assistance Coordinator during a critical vacancy and transition period. This not only ensured no interruption in service but also resulted in numerous improvements for clients and the program.

**Jody Heinrich – North Central Texas HIV Planning Council**

Working with a volunteer committee of 35 concerned individuals representing the 38 counties served by the North Central Texas HIV Planning Council requires skill and dedication, which are just two traits Jody has demonstrated as the Assistant Planning Council Coordinator. Jody goes beyond the requirements mandated by the federal and state government by tapping into each volunteer’s unique insight of the HIV epidemic. This helps ensure diverse voices are reflected in determining the most crucial services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

**Doug Fabio – Health Planning and Policy**

Thanks to Doug’s knowledge of public health programs, he is able to coordinate or assist in a number of successful community projects such as Teen Videofest, Champions in Health and various health fair planning committees. He is able to juggle a number of projects, but he always takes the time to listen to and help a colleague. Doug is a team player and can always be relied upon to give 110 percent.

**Nancy Speer – Community Health Promotion**

Nancy, a 20-year veteran of TCHP, was recognized for her experience and knowledge of immunizations, which has proven very valuable at the many different clinics she works. When not actually giving vaccinations, she completes the monthly vaccine reports, conducts client calls, orders vaccine and helps with immunization audits.

---

**Project of the Year**

The Tarrant County WIC Library Project has partnered with 22 libraries to promote the “Read to your Child” nutrition education WIC project. While providing more than 650 books about food, eating, nutrition and breastfeeding, the WIC Library Project encourages participants to explore local libraries and introduce their young children to the world of reading. This activity promotes WIC nutrition. During 2004, more than 2,400 WIC clients were active in the project.
Information provided is for selected reportable diseases

Serious health threats and suspected bioterrorism agents also are reportable and include anthrax, smallpox, plague, tularemia, botulism, brucellosis, Q fever and viral hemorrhagic fever.

1 HIV became reportable by name in 1999.
2 Reporting of hepatitis B and C was changed in 2001 to require the notification of chronic cases as well as acute cases.
3 Salmonellosis figures tend to fluctuate as a result of reporting and laboratory testing.

*Breast & Cervical Cancer Control Program
**Women, Infants and Children Program
***Directly Observed Preventive Therapy
Tarrant County Commissioners Court
Tom Vandergriff  County Judge
Dionne Bagsby  Commissioner Precinct 1
   (term expired Dec. 31, 2004)
Marti VanRavenswaay  Commissioner Precinct 2
B. Glen Whitley  Commissioner Precinct 3
J.D. Johnson  Commissioner Precinct 4
G.K. Maenius  County Administrator

Tarrant County Public Health
1101 S. Main Street, Fort Worth, Texas 76104
   817-321-4700
http://health.tarrantcounty.com

About the cover:
Top left to bottom right: Texas Motor Speedway emergency staff tend to volunteer victims during “dirty bomb” disaster exercise; Adult Health Services staff member Raymond Herrera with client; United Way members and volunteers hike to TCPH; staff nurse Nancy Speers provides flu shot for client; Public Health’s Ann Salyer-Caldwell receives supply of flu vaccine from the Postal Service; Martin High School Senior Gabe Evans receives Teen Videofest prize check from TCPH Director Lou Brewer.