



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

Texas Department of State  
Health Services

# 2024

## **EPIDEMIOLOGY AND LABORATORY CAPACITY (ELC) WORKSHOP**

*Office of the Chief State Epidemiologist*

February 15 – 16, 2024

## **Message from the DSHS Chief State Epidemiologist**

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***Let Us Continue to Communicate ... Research ... Collaborate***

***Welcome to the 2024 Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) Workshop!***

Welcome to the 2024 Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Workshop! We are so excited to spend the next two days connecting, communicating, and collaborating with you all. As we move into an exciting future for public health, our partnerships will be more important than ever.

I am reminded every day of incredible skill, dedication, and hard work that you all display to keep Texans healthy and safe. I hope this workshop will be an opportunity to reflect on the impact we have on the lives of people in our state, learn from one another, and look ahead together.

Thank you for all you do!

***Thank You for All You Do to Protect All Texans***



**Varun Shetty, MD, MBA, MS**

**Chief State Epidemiologist,  
Texas Department of State Health Services**

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# Thursday, February 15, 2024 Session Schedule Summary

Time	Big' Tex Auditorium	
<b>8:00</b>	Registration & Check In	
8:15		
<b>8:30</b>	Opening Plenary: The State of the State of Texas Public Health Infectious Diseases & Highlights of special analyses on RSV and COVID-19	
8:45		
<b>9:00</b>		
9:15	The Steps to Submitting Specimens to DSHS Austin Laboratory	
9:45		
<b>10:00</b>	Break	
10:15	Public Health Informatics and Data Exchange Modernization and Enhancement Updates	
<b>10:30</b>		
10:45		
<b>11:00</b>	Panel - Communications During Public Health Investigations	
11:15		
<b>11:30</b>		
11:45	Lunch Break	
<b>12:00</b>		
12:15	Managing Stress, Avoiding Burnout	
<b>12:30</b>		
12:45		
<b>1:00</b>	<i>Candida auris</i> : The Fungus Among Us	
1:15		
<b>1:30</b>	Break	
1:45		
<b>2:00</b>	Investigation of Human Rabies in a School-Aged Medina County Resident, Texas 2021	
2:15		
<b>2:30</b>		
2:45	Response to a White Powder Call, Experience and Lessons Learned	
<b>3:00</b>		
3:15		
<b>3:30</b>	Break	
3:45		
<b>4:00</b>	Response to a White Powder Call, Experience and Lessons Learned	
4:15		
<b>4:30</b>	Response to a White Powder Call, Experience and Lessons Learned	
4:45		
<b>5:00</b>		

# Thursday, February 15, 2024 Sessions

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**8:30 a.m. – 9:30 p.m**      **Opening Plenary: The State of the State of Texas Public Health Infectious Diseases & Highlights of special analyses on RSV and COVID-19**      **Big Tex**

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In this opening session to the 2024 ELC Workshop, we will provide an overview of recent trends and activities in Texas Public Health infectious disease data, and of the health status of Texans. These data are a culmination of the painstaking work from each and every one of you. We will also share highlights of special analyses on RSV and COVID-19.



*Varun Shetty, MD, MBA, MS*  
Chief State Epidemiologist  
DSHS OSCE



*Diana Martinez, PhD, MD*  
Deputy State Epidemiologist  
DSHS OSCE

**9:30 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.**      **The Steps to Submitting Specimens to DSHS Austin Laboratory**      **Big Tex**

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This presentation is an overview of the DSHS Microbiology Unit's specimen submission process. Tips on how to avoid the most common causes of specimen rejection are discussed. The Laboratory's Specimen Courier program and Results Web portal enrollment are also covered.



*Niamh Gray*  
Education Specialist,  
DSHS Microbiology Unit

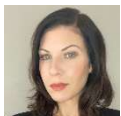


*Eliza Villareal*  
Laboratory Courier  
Coordinator DSHS

**10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**      **Public Health Informatics and Data Exchange Modernization and Enhancement Updates**      **Big Tex**

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The first part of the presentation will go over the recent enhancements and new functionality that were added in National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS) over the last few months. The second part will cover what has been approved for release in the next few months. All future NEDSS enhancements and new functionality we are currently planning to add to NEDSS in the next two years will also be explained, including a new NEDSS login page, a new NEDSS user interface design, and a lot of new functionality that will improve the end users' daily activities.



*Jessica Romano, MPH*  
Technical Lead  
DSHS PHID

**11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Panel: Communications During Public Health Investigations** **Big Tex**

Panelists will discuss information about communication during public health case investigations. Public health investigations frequently require rapid response from many areas of the Texas public health network and beyond, collaborating in order to manage the public health investigation effectively. The panel will consist of experts from the DSHS Central Office, DSHS Regions, and Local Health Departments who will provide their tips on effective communication across the entire public health network to address the needs of a case investigation.



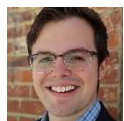
*Eric Almirol  
DSHS*



*Kenny Davis, MPH  
Manager III  
DSHS EAIDU FB/WB,  
HCID*



*Minda Weldon, PhD  
Senior Epidemiologist  
Austin Public Health  
Epidemiology &  
Surveillance Unit*



*Cody Hyde, MPH  
Disaster Epidemiologist  
Austin Public Health*



*Lara Anton  
Senior Press Officer  
DSHS Media Relations*

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**12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. LUNCH BREAK**

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**1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Managing Stress, Avoiding Burnout** **Big Tex**

As public health personnel, we are frequently consumed with assisting others, whether in times of need or by being proactive before a threat emerges. We understand how to help others and display this capacity on a regular basis, but it is easy to lose sight of our own well-being. This presentation offers strategies and emphasizes the need to take care of our own physical and mental health.



*Chelsea Smith, LMSW,  
LCDC  
Behavioral Health  
Coordinator  
PHR 7*

**2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Candida auris: The Fungus Among Us** **Big Tex**

*Candida auris*, an emerging and often multidrug-resistant fungus, can cause serious infections and spreads easily in healthcare settings. The presentation will describe the background and significance of *C. auris*, the data trends of this organism in Texas, and how Texas epidemiologists respond to cases of *C. auris*. An outbreak investigation involving correctional facilities in Texas will also be discussed.



*Cynthia Williams, MPH,  
CIC,  
HAI Epidemiologist III  
DSHS HSU*



*Gretchen Rodriguez, MPH,  
CIC  
Lead HAI Epidemiologist  
IV  
DSHS HSU*



*Melissa LeBrun, DNP,  
MPH, APRN, FNP-C, CIC  
Epidemiologist, MDRO/AR  
Data and Research  
Coordinator  
DSHS HSU*

**3:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. Investigation of Human Rabies in a School-Aged Medina County Resident, Texas 2021**

**Big Tex**

This session will provide an overview of a pediatric human rabies case that involved a multi-disciplinary public health response between DSHS, the CDC, and healthcare specialists. Information will be provided on the patient presentation and management, post exposure risk assessments, and public health outreach efforts.



*Amanda Kieffer, DVM,  
MPH, DACVPM  
Zoonosis Control  
Veterinarian  
PHR 8*

**4:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. Response to a White Powder Call: Experience and Lessons Learned**

**Big Tex**

Austin Public Health responds to many white powder calls each year. This session will cover the anecdotes and practical experiences gained during these investigations, including best practices, relationship building, and collaboration with entities outside of public health throughout a white powder call investigation.



*Ashley Hawes, MPH, CQA  
Disaster Epidemiologist  
Austin Public Health*

# Friday, February 16, 2024 Session Schedule Summary

Time	Big' Tex	Balcones	Stadium	Bevo	
<b>8:00</b> 8:05 8:10	Registration & Check In				
8:15 8:20 8:25					
<b>8:30</b> 8:35 8:40					
8:45 8:50 8:55	New Case Definitions for Mumps, Polio, and Varicella	Genetic Sequencing at DSHS Austin Laboratory: An Introduction	Coordinating with Other Agencies as Demonstrated in Three Investigations	NEDSS training	
<b>9:00</b> 9:05 9:10					
9:15 9:20 9:25	Break				
<b>9:30</b> 9:35 9:40	Beyond the Pool: Legionella Outbreak in a Community Fitness Center	HAI-lights of Texas: Bone Allograft, <i>C. Auris</i> in LTAC, <i>Fungal Meningitis</i>	Updates on High Consequence Infectious Diseases: A Review of Statewide Mpox Cases and New Tools for Monitoring		
9:45 9:50 9:55					
<b>10:00</b> 10:05 10:10					
10:15 10:20 10:25	Break				
<b>10:30</b> 10:35 10:40	2023 Texas <i>Cyclospora</i> Season & Restaurant Outbreak Investigation and Shiga toxin-producing <i>Escherichia coli</i> & Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome: Epidemiology and NEDSS Reporting	Lessons Learned from an Autochthonous Malaria Investigation	Panel - Disease Investigation Interviewing		2022 Summary of Finalized Data and Results and 2023 QA
10:45 10:50 10:55					
<b>11:00</b> 11:05 11:10					
11:15 11:20 11:25	Break				
<b>11:30</b> 11:35 11:40	Closing Plenary by Grace Kubin				
11:45 11:50 11:55					
<b>12:00</b>					



# Friday, February 16, 2024 Sessions

8:30 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

## New Case Definitions for Mumps, Polio, and Varicella

Big Tex

This presentation describes changes in case definitions for varicella, mumps, and polio for 2024 surveillance. Attendees will learn about different clinical criteria, laboratory evidence required, and case statuses, with emphasis on changes that will have an impact on workload and processes. A Q&A session after the presentation will allow attendees to ask specific questions for better understanding of these vaccine preventable disease surveillance changes.



*Elise Huebner, MS, CPH, CIC  
Epidemiologist III, Team Lead  
DSHS EAIDU VPD*



*Binoj Peter, MBBS, MPH  
Epidemiologist II  
DSHS EAIDU VPD*



*Varsha Misra, MPH  
Epidemiologist I, Vaccine Preventable Diseases  
DSHS EAIDU*

8:30 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

## Genetic Sequencing at DSHS Austin Laboratory: An Introduction

Balcones

This session will introduce the new Genetic Sequencing Branch at DSHS, sharing current and future plans for how next generation sequencing supports public health testing and surveillance.



*Bonnie Oh, PhD  
Molecular Biologist IV,  
Team Lead Microbial Genomics*



*Maliha Rahman, PhD  
Team Lead Advanced Molecular Detection*

8:30 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

## Coordinating with Other Agencies as Demonstrated in Three Investigations

Stadium

Epidemiologists from three jurisdictions will share details from high profile case investigations that involved coordination with agencies outside the health department. Information on investigative process and select agent surveillance will be emphasized.



*Gabriela Calvi, MPH  
Epidemiologist Level I  
Dallas County HHS*



*Brent Moore, DVM, MS, MPH, DACVPM  
Regional State Public Health Veterinarian  
PHR 4/5N*



*Kelly Spencer, AAS, BS  
Zoonosis Specialist  
DSHS PHR 9/10*

8:30 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.

## NEDSS Training

Bevo

With the NEDSS Interoperability & Functional Improvement (NIFI) Project, the PHID team has added new enhancements and functionality to NEDSS. In this training session, the PHID team will cover these new enhancements. Additionally, in this session, we will also go over custom queues and eICRs.



*Sepehr Arshadmansab,  
MPH  
Health Informatics Specialist  
DSHS PHID*

9:30 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.

**Beyond the Pool: Legionella Outbreak in a  
Community Fitness Center**

Big Tex

A *Legionella* outbreak occurred at a 55+ community center, leading to multiple cases of Legionnaires disease among the residents. The source of the outbreak was identified and center is now reopened.



Nicolette Janoski, MPH  
Epidemiology Division  
Manager  
Fort Bend County

9:30 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.

**HAI-Lights of Texas: Bone Allograft, *C. auris* in  
LTAC, Fungal Meningitis**

Balcones

Texas epidemiologists will highlight investigations of healthcare-associated infections (HAI) which occurred in different parts of Texas in 2023. Discussion will include investigations of *tuberculosis* disease associated with contaminated bone graft products, a *Candida auris* outbreak in a long-term acute care hospital, and *fungal meningitis* associated with medical tourism.



Kourtney Lopez, MPH,  
a-IPC  
HAI Epidemiologist II  
DSHS HSU



Angel Guevara, MS, MPH,  
CIC  
HAI Epidemiologist III  
DSHS HSU Region 11



Jose Ulloa, MPH  
Epidemiologist  
San Antonio Metro Health  
District



Amanda Decimo, RN, MPH  
Tuberculosis Nurse  
Consultant  
DSHS TB/Hansen's

9:30 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.

**Updates on High Consequence Infectious  
Diseases: A Review of Statewide Mpox Cases  
and New Tools for Monitoring**

Stadium

During this session, the High Consequence Infectious Disease (HCID) Team will present an update on the current status of the Mpox outbreak and will review Mpox case data since 2022, including data and analyses not previously presented. Attendees will also learn about the importance of advanced tools in monitoring outbreaks of HCIDs, with a focus on integrating CDC's Text Illness Monitoring system with Qualtrics-based options to deepen understanding of the tools used and enhance surveillance practices.



Stephen White, PhD,  
MLS(ASCP)CM  
Epidemiologist III Team  
Lead  
DSHS EAIDU



Rania Milleron, SM, PhD  
Epidemiologist II  
DSHS EAIDU

**10:30 a.m. – 11:20 a.m. 2023 Texas Cyclospora Season & Restaurant Outbreak Investigation and Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* & Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome: Epidemiology and NEDSS Reporting** **Big Tex**

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The first presentation will provide an overview of the biological characteristics of *Cyclospora cayentanensis* and its surveillance in Texas. The 2023 *Cyclospora* season's successes and challenges and a multi-jurisdictional *Cyclospora* outbreak in 2023 will also be discussed. The presenter will also provide an update on the most recent research conducted by CDC on *Cyclospora cayentanensis*. The second presentation will provide an overview of the epidemiology and surveillance of Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) and hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) in Texas. This presentation will also show examples of the most common errors and their corrections to improve the quality of NEDSS data reporting.



*Samantha Spencer, MPH  
Epidemiologist II  
DSHS EAIDU FB/WB*



*Quoc Phung (Selena)  
Than, MPH  
Epidemiologist II  
DSHS EAIDU FB/WB*

**10:30 a.m. – 11:20 a.m. Lessons Learned from an Autochthonous Malaria Investigation** **Balcones**

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In June 2023, a malaria case with no reported travel history outside of the United States prior to onset was reported to the health department. This case investigation relied on coordination between state, regional, and local health departments. Presenters will provide a brief overview of the case and response activities taken by Cameron County and its municipalities to include case surveillance, mosquito surveillance and control activities, and public outreach and education.



*Amira Bashadi, MPH  
Epidemiologist II  
DSHS Zoonosis Control  
Branch*



*Leigh-Anne Lawton  
Program Specialist III  
PHR 6/5s*



*Samantha Puttick  
Public Health and  
Prevention Specialist  
PHR 4/5n*



*Raquel Castillo, MPH  
Chief Epidemiologist  
Cameron County Public  
Health*

**10:30 a.m. – 11:20 a.m. Panel: Disease Investigation Interviewing** **Stadium**

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This panel will discuss best practices for conducting disease investigation interviews. The panel will include experts from DSHS Regions and Local Health Departments who will share the tips and tricks they have learned that get the most information during interviews and conduct a successful disease investigation.



*Melina Granados, RN,  
BSN  
Public Health Nurse  
PHR 8 Tuberculosis  
Program*



*Tiffany Torres, MPH  
Epidemiologist  
City of Lubbock*



*Brandon (Tyler) Collins,  
MA  
Epidemiologist  
City of Midland Health  
Department*

**10:30 a.m. – 11:20 a.m. 2022 Summary of Finalized Data and Results and 2023 QA**

**Bevo**

Each year, Texas and all States collaborates with CDC to produce finalized counts and statistics notifiable diseases. This effort involves screening through and conducting quality assurance activities (QA) for all Texas reportable disease data to ensure case information is accurate and ready for final publication. This presentation summarizes results for the Texas 2022 data that you helped compile, and provides guidance to use when conducting QA in preparation to finalize 2023 data.



*Jeffrey Swanson, PhD  
Medical Research  
Specialist  
DSHS EAIDU DA*



*Gabrielle Franco, MPH  
Epidemiologist I  
DSHS EAIDU DA*

**11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Closing Plenary**

**Big Tex**

To close out the 2024 ELC Workshop Dr. Grace Kubin, Associate Commissioner and Director of the DSHS Laboratory, will discuss the influence the federal ELC Grant has had and continues to have on partnerships and collaboration across the Texas Public Health network, coordination between the DSHS Laboratory and the rest of the Texas Public Health Network. Dr Kubin will also discuss the next steps for ELC funding and activity.



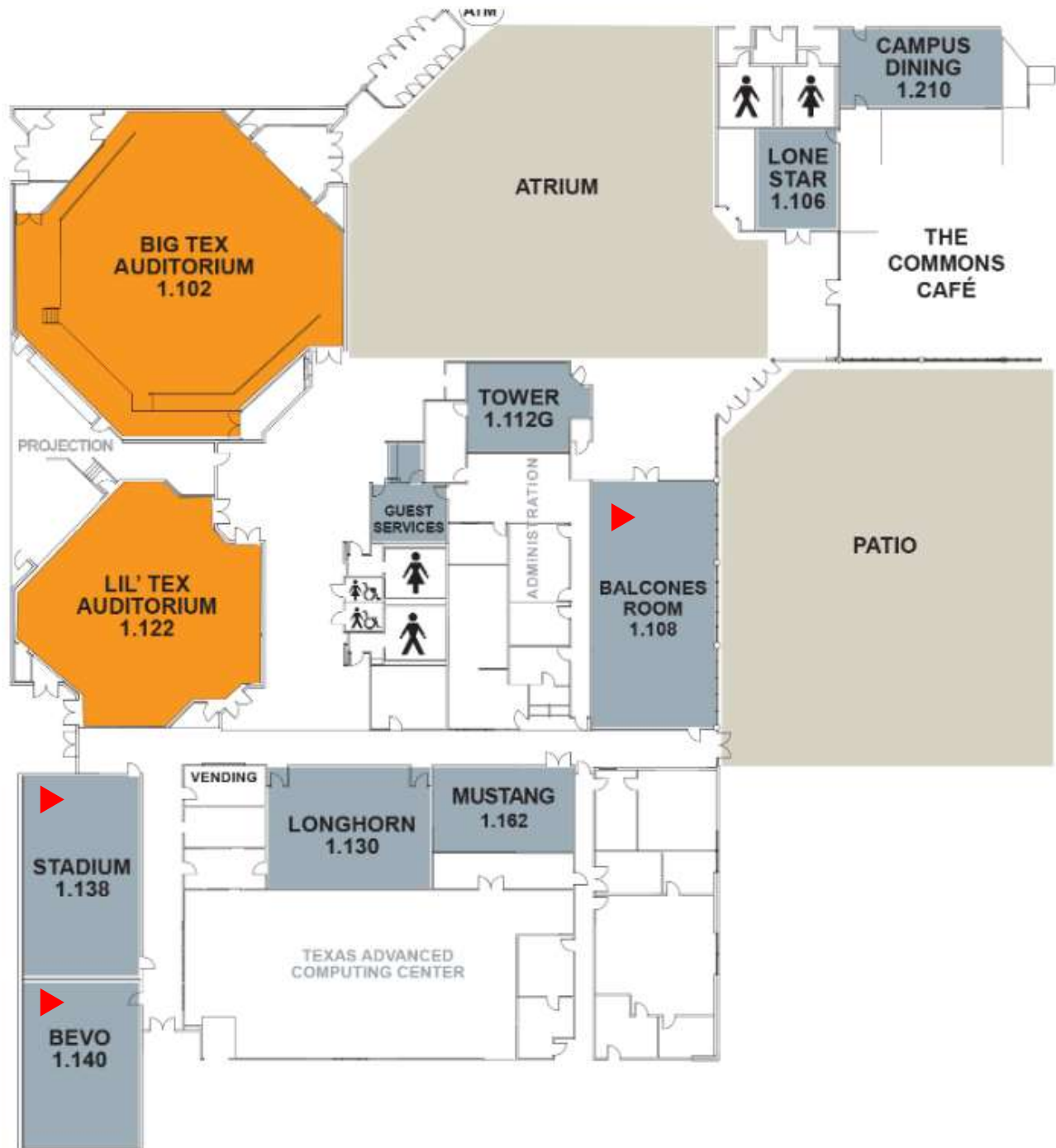
*Grace Kubin, PhD  
Associate Commissioner,  
Laboratory Director  
DSHS Laboratory Division*

## Venue & Parking

The Commons Conference Center is located in the J. J. Pickle Research Center at 2901 Read Granberry Trail, Austin, TX 78758. Visitor parking can be found in the parking lots to the north, west, and east of the Commons building. ADA accessible spaces are located on the west and north sides of the building. Visitors using these parking lots will need to print and display a parking permit where it is visible on their dashboard.

Food and drink can be purchased on-site at the Commons Café which operates from 7:30 am – 2 pm daily.

Further information about the Commons can be found online at <https://commons.utexas.edu/>.



# DSHS General Information

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## Vision

- ★ Protecting the health of Texans

## Values

- ★ Ensure effective use of resources
- ★ Collaborate with our partners
- ★ Serve the public with compassion and respect
- ★ Empower a dedicated and diverse workforce
- ★ Lead with integrity and empathy
- ★ Strive for excellence

## Mission

- ★ Improving health outcomes of all Texans by providing essential laboratory services and using proven strategies to control emerging and ongoing infectious disease threats.



**TEXAS**

Health and Human Services

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**Texas Department of State  
Health Services**

## Contact Information

### **Emerging and Acute Infectious Disease Unit**

Texas Department of State Health Services

PO Box 149347

Mail Code 1960

Austin, Texas 78756

Phone: 512-776-7676

Fax: 512-776-7616

**[EAIDUConference@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:EAIDUConference@dshs.texas.gov)**