

# THE VITAL STATISTICS REVIEW

FALL 2010

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## STRONG SUPPORT, SUCCESS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCAL REGISTRAR SITE VISIT PROGRAM

The Site Visit Program is a process for ensuring that providers complete vital statistics data in a timely and accurate manner. It is poised to visit all 254 counties, including more than 400 local registrar offices, over the next few years.

In January 2010, Field Services Representatives created and revised tools



Derek Johnson  
East Texas, Houston Metroplex

for site visits to local registrar offices for the purpose of acquiring higher data quality and better timely reporting of vital events by those offices visited and, if appropriate, to provide consolidation information to local registrar offices. To test the tools and materials and to standardize site visit procedures, Field Services Representatives initiated a pilot program by visiting seven local registrar offices in three different counties from April 30 to May 20, 2010. Upon review of the pilot phase, Field Services Representative revised the tools and materials and from July to September 2010 visited a total of 26 local registrar offices (including county clerks, city clerks and justices of the peace) in seven different counties. These visits provided Field Services Representatives with a look at each office's overall compliance, an opportunity to provide training to local registrar office staff, and, when necessary, offering offices the possibility of consolidation.



Iris Rodriguez  
South and Southwest Texas

In visiting the 26 local registrar offices, Field Service Representatives highlighted many of the positive aspects of the local registrar offices visited. All were using bank note security paper that met the minimum security paper features

and the proper certification statements for vital records issuance. In addition, a majority of the offices visited had signed up to use the Texas Electronic Registrar (TER) system and were using it to register home births and deaths.

Even among the positive elements found at each office, several offices in particular stood out. The City of Austin, the City of College Station, and the Bastrop County Clerk's Office all received perfect scores on their on-site visit surveys. The City of Bryan not only received a perfect score but also received special mention both for its method for voiding security paper and the security process in place to ensure their copier's hard-drive is handed over to their office before the copier is removed from their facility. In addition, The Texarkana City Clerk's office managed the resignation of its two city clerks despite a lack of a transition plan in place.

Field Services Representatives will begin site visits again in January 2011 and look forward to meeting the local registrars in their area.



Albert Rivera  
Manager, Field Services



Catherine Roche  
Northwest Texas and Panhandle



Victor Farinelli  
Central Texas



# ACCENTS AND SPECIAL CHARACTERS IN TEXAS BIRTH CERTIFICATES

**QUESTION:** Can accents be used in a child's name on the birth certificate?

**ANSWER:** No.

The Texas Department of State Health Services sends data to the Social Security Administration (SSA) in order to enumerate Social Security numbers for children. In order for their computers to read our data, it has to be compatible.

Federal Public Law 100-235, also known as the "Computer Security Act of 1987" requires that all federal databases follow the standards determined by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and use the 26 letters of the alphabet without diacritical marks. A diacritical mark is a mark added to a letter to give it special phonetic value; e.g. the two dots placed over the letter "ü." (Note: spaces, hyphens and apostrophes are acceptable). The Social Security Administration is required to follow the above law.

The Department of State Health Services is directed by Texas law to prescribe the form and contents of the standard birth certificate filed in the state of Texas. In order for the birth data to be read by SSA computers (so children can be issued Social Security numbers) the Department of State Health Services states that the contents of the birth certificate will also follow the guidelines set forth by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

## 2010 REGIONAL CONFERENCES

This past summer VSU along with the Texas Public Health Association, hosted the Vital Statistics Regional Conferences across the state. There were a total of four conferences held in South Padre Island, Fort Worth, San Antonio and Midland.

Attendees included local registration offices, county & district clerk offices, Justice of the Peace offices, hospital & birthing center staff, midwives, funeral home directors and staff, Medical Examiner staff and more.

The curriculum focused on providing information and training to improve the accuracy, timeliness, statutory compliance, customer service and efficiency of registering vital events in Texas. There were three tracks: Birth Registration, Death Registration and Registration and Issuance, each of which was comprised of relevant topical sessions.

The Regional Conferences are offered each year at a variety of locations around the state of Texas in an effort to continue to train and assist all of our partners in vital records.



## MRC ANNUAL PROJECT

In 2009, VSU launched the Graduates Annual Project for the Master Registrar Certification (MRC) Course. We brought together all of the graduates from the MRC courses and pooled their wealth of knowledge and experience to assist us with an annual project. The 2009 project was to revise and update the Local Registrar Handbook. This project has been completed and the newly revised handbook will be presented at this Year's 2010 Texas Vital Statistics Annual conference.

Each year the group will be asked to participate in an annual project. The project topic will be introduced at the Annual Conference and the final presentation of the project will be unveiled at the following Annual Conference.

The 2011, MRC project will be to prepare a certification course for Birth Registrars that would be similar to the Master Registrar Course for Local Registrars.

## CHANGES IN ABSENT APPLICANT LAW

In the last legislative session a bill was passed that amended the Texas Family Code that required all Absent Applicant affidavits to be notarized.

Prior to the last legislative session, Texas state law did not require that the absent applicant affidavit be notarized.

The Texas Family Code §2.006(b)(1) used to state: The person applying on behalf of an absent applicant shall provide to the clerk the affidavit of absent applicant as provided by this subchapter.

At that time, VSU suggested that the absent applicant affidavit be notarized, but it was not required by law. Many County Clerks also had a separate absent applicant application for incarcerated individuals where the incarcerated person could make an unsworn statement per the following law:

Civil Practices and Remedies Code §132.001:

an unsworn declaration made as provided by this chapter by an inmate in the Texas Department of Corrections or in a county jail may be used in lieu of a written sworn declaration, verification, certification, oath, or affidavit required by statute or required by a rule, order, or requirement adopted as provided by law.

So if the person was in TDCJ or county jail they could make an unsworn statement, as listed below, on the absent applicant application:

C.P.R. § 132.003. FORM OF DECLARATION. The form of a declaration under this chapter must be substantially as follows: "I, (insert name and inmate identifying number from Texas Department of Corrections or county jail), being presently incarcerated in (insert Texas Department of Corrections unit name or county jail name) in \_\_\_\_\_ County, Texas, declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on (date). (signature)"

In the last legislative session the law makers of Texas amended the FC §2.006 (b)(1) to read: the person applying on behalf of an absent applicant shall provide to the clerk: notwithstanding Section 132.001, Civil Practice and Remedies Code, the notarized affidavit of the absent applicant as provided by this subchapter;

One of the key words here is notwithstanding. Notwithstanding is defined as "in spite of the fact that" or "regardless of" or "although".

In the context of the new law, notwithstanding means that even though there is a provision in the law to allow for person who are incarcerated to make unsworn declarations, this provision does not apply to the marriage license application process.

Therefore every absent applicant affidavit must be notarized regardless of whether they are incarcerated or not.

## LOCAL REGISTRAR VISITATION PLAN EXEMPLARY EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES

The VSU Field Unit has begun a visitation plan which will encompass all of the local registrar offices in the state of Texas over the next few years. The plan began in July and August and will continue visiting local registrar offices in January of 2011.

During our visits, VSU found many of the local registrar offices implementing best practices that we would like to share.

The **City of Lubbock** had no compliance issues during our survey visit. They had a binder made for us that included all vital information regarding compliance with state statutes and regulations.

The **Potter County Clerk's Office** had posters and brochures available in their lobby promoting and providing easy access to the public on Together In Texas programs.

The **City of Amarillo** upgraded their filing shelves to include rotating shelving to make storage and access to records more efficient.

The **Ector County Clerk's Office** has a very pro-active preservation program. They are storing their records electronically in a climate controlled environment off-site with multiple backup systems. They have also developed a color coded system on their computers to easily identify records with specific information required; i.e. records with amendments attached.

The **Tom Green County Clerk's Office** and the **Ector County Clerk's Office** both copy the applicants proof of identification directly onto the application filed in their office so that there is no opportunity for them to be separated or lost.

In the **City of Bryan** along with recording the voided security paper on the certificate tracking log, they also make a receipt for the voided banknote paper along with scanning the voided paper into laser-fiche. This is done to insure that all security paper used and voided is reconciled with their paper stock, log and accounting. They also have a security process in place to insure that the copier hard-drive is handed over to their office before the copier is removed from the facility. This extra step is vital to protecting vital statistics.

## FLU SHOTS

The Texas Department of State Health Services is urging everyone over 6 months old to get a seasonal flu shot as soon as possible.

“There’s no reason to wait. The supply is here,” said Dr. David Lakey, DSHS commissioner. “We usually see an increase in flu cases in late October or early November. It takes the vaccine about two weeks to become effective, so get vaccinated now to protect yourself and your family.” Lakey said this year’s seasonal vaccine also protects against H1N1 flu. A nasal spray vaccine is an option for healthy people ages 2 to 49 who are not pregnant.

The flu is caused by various influenza viruses. Symptoms include fever, coughing, sore throat, aches, chills and fatigue. Most healthy people recover without problems, but people over 65, pregnant women, young children and people with chronic health conditions are at higher risk for serious complications and even death. It is especially important for people in those high-risk groups to be vaccinated.

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently broadened its recommendation, urging everyone at least 6 months old to get vaccinated.*

The CDC also says children ages 6 months to 8 years who have not previously been vaccinated for both seasonal and H1N1 flu should get two doses of the vaccine at least four weeks apart.

A different flu vaccine is produced each year because different strains of the virus circulate. The three strains covered by this year’s vaccine are A/California/7/2009 (H1N1), A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2), B/Brisbane/60/2008.

Getting a flu shot is the best way to prevent flu from spreading. Also, cover all coughs and sneezes, wash hands frequently with soap and water or hand sanitizer and stay home if sick.

People should contact their health care provider, local health department or 2-1-1 to find out where to get a flu shot. Flu information and tips for protecting against the flu are at [texasflu.org](http://texasflu.org).



Howdy Ya’ll,

The Texas Department of State Health Services, Vital Statistics Unit, would like to invite you to the 56th Annual Vital Statistics Conference; “Plan, Prepare, Protect”.

In an every changing and unpredictable world these three words make up the basis for a healthier and secure Texas. Planning and preparation dictate a positive and useful program that will protect Texans.

This year we are welcoming the Mass Fatality division of the health department to join us in Vital Statistics and provide information on how our agencies can come together for a common goal — better health for Texans.

The Annual Conference agenda will include sessions on planning and preparing for major catastrophic events as well as information on the vital statistics statutes, the TER system, functions of birth, death and marriage reporting. Panels for open discussion of hot topics will be made available in all areas of vital records. The newly revised local registrar handbook will be introduced and made available.

We are pleased to announce that our keynote speaker will be Dr. Jocelyn Sargent from the W.W. Kellogg Foundation. She will speak on health projects the foundation has been involved in as well as grant opportunities through the Kellogg Foundation.

So come join our posse of good guys who Plan, Prepare and Protect for a healthier, more secure Texas!

## JUSTICE OF THE PEACE TRAINING

The Department of State Health Services Vital Statistics Unit has been asked by the Texas Justice Court Training Center to conduct death registration trainings at a number of their Justice of the Peace Seminars. The training is part of an interactive inquest round table discussion along with the basics of online death registration reporting.

If you are a justice of the peace and you are interested in attending one of these seminars please visit the Texas Justice Court Training Center website at <http://www.tjctc.org/>. Below are list of dates and locations of the seminars:

- Nov. 14 - 17, 2010** Tyler, Texas
- Feb. 20 - 23, 2011** Austin, Texas
- March 1 - 4, 2011** Corpus Christi, Texas
- March 27 - 30, 2011** Galveston, Texas
- June 26 - 29, 2011** Amarillo, Texas

# REGISTRY HELPS REUNITE ADULT ADOPTEES WITH BIRTH PARENTS, SIBLINGS

For some, it is a medical need to know.

For others, it is the desire to put life's jigsaw puzzle pieces together.

For these and other reasons, adoption information provides answers to long-held questions about lives and families.

In Texas, adoption records are confidential and court records sealed. People usually have little or no information about their birth parents, siblings or children placed for adoption.

But for those looking for information, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) offers a chance to be matched with birth family

members. The Texas Vital Statistics Central Adoption Registry can reunite adult adoptees with birth parents or siblings who sign up looking for each other.

"The registry is unique in that we have the authority, without a court order, to view a sealed file and confidential record," said Patricia Molina, DSHS program administrator for the registry. "This ability allows us to match two biologically related people. A match occurs only when an adopted person and the birth parent or a biological sibling voluntarily register."

Once a match is made, a letter is sent to each person with the results. But before information is exchanged, everyone is required to complete

a one-hour counseling session that educates and prepares them for the reunion. DSHS will help people find a counselor.

"The counseling will help identify a support system as the reunion progresses, whether the husband, wife or other children will be supportive, what they see as the best and worse outcome from a reunion and what they want the outcome to be," Molina said.

After the counseling session, each person prepares a personal history with photographs such as baby pictures, school and family photos. The biographies are then shared with each participant at the same time that the identifying information is exchanged.

"These biographies establish a foundation for the reunion," said Molina. "People may see that they look like their birth mother or have the same nose or chin as a sibling."

Molina said that there are stages to a reunion, often beginning with a honeymoon phase. She said that people may need to set boundaries and outline how far they want the relationship to go. Some people, she said, may decide at some point to end the relationship.

"Adoption is a life-long process," Molina said. "Some people may want to know more as they grow older, often starting with wanting to know only medical history but later wanting contact."

Although the adoptive parents are not a part of the registry, adoptees are encouraged to share information with their adoptive families.

The DSHS registry, which began in 1984, has registered more than 8,100 people looking for one another, including adult adoptees, birth mothers, adult siblings and birth fathers. About three



times as many adoptees are registered as are birth mothers. "We make about 20 to 30 matches a year," Molina said.

For a person to become a part of the Central Adoption Registry they must:

- Have been adopted in Texas or have been born in Texas and adopted in another state or
- Be the birth parent or sibling of an adoptee
- Be 18 years old or older and
- Provide proof of age and identity with a copy of a birth certificate and a valid government-issued photo ID.

To get an application, write the Central Adoption Registry (MC 1966), P.O. Box 149347, Austin, TX 78714-9347; call (512) 458-7388 or toll free (888) 963-7111, ext. 7388; or download an application online at [www.dshs.state.tx.us/vs/reqproc/adoptionregistry.shtm](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/vs/reqproc/adoptionregistry.shtm). Cost to be in the registry is \$30 but may be waived or reduced.

## OLD COPIERS COULD BE TARGET OF IDENTITY THIEVES

If your office has a copier that was build after 2002, it likely contains a hard drive that stores an image of every document it copies, scans or emails. And if it is used in processing vital records documents, it has the potential of becoming the target of identity thieves.

In a CBS News story released last April, a digital copier security company showed the news organization the ease with which discarded copiers could be acquired and the contents taken from their hard drives. On one machine, they found individual medical records, the use of which could be a serious breach of privacy laws. Likewise, because offices that handle vital records may copy or scan birth and death records, the copiers could become much sought after if they need to be replaced.

When disposing of copiers, minimize the risk of potential identity theft by ensuring the hard drive is completely scrubbed of all data or removed completely. For example, the City of Bryan instituted a process to ensure their copier's hard-drive is handed over to their office before the copier is removed from their facility.



# THE TEXAS ELECTRONIC REGISTRAR (TER)

As you may already know, the Texas Electronic Registrar (TER) is an integrated, Internet-based system used to register Texas birth, death and marriage events.

located in the Winters Complex, currently under the management of IBM's Team for Texas. User security features insure appropriate access by our customers.

VSU manages the distribution, training and user support for TER customers statewide. The vital records data is stored in a central server database

Features include user profiles, passwords, and assignment of applicable business processes according to user functions, or role.



**1,439 out of 1,500** (approx)  
Funeral Homes are enrolled in TER

**1,260** Funeral Homes have used TER



**647 out of 818**  
Justice of the Peace are enrolled in TER

**590** Justices of the Peace have used TER



**12,104 out of 15,000**  
Physicians are enrolled in TER

**6,178** Physicians have used TER

**All** Medical Examiners Office in Texas are using TER

## TER BIRTH

The TER Birth & Customer Service modules were implemented mid-late 2004. Full adoption of the TER Birth module by hospitals was effective 1/1/2005, coinciding with the 1/2005 revision of the Texas Certificate of Birth. There are currently 456 hospitals, 58 birthing centers and 67 midwives utilizing TER, representing 99.6% of the births in Texas.

## TER DEATH

The TER Death module (TEDR) was implemented 1/1/2006, coinciding with the 1/2006 revision of the Texas Certificate of Death.

TEDR implementation has been a slower process than birth for various reasons. One challenge in electronic death registration is due to the death registration process itself - multiple participants are necessary to complete a single death registration.

A fully electronic death registration requires the participation of the funeral home, the medical certifier, and the local registration official.

As of August 31, 2010, we have 1,439 funeral homes enrolled in the system, of which 1,260 have used TER for death registration. 12,761 medical certifiers are enrolled, of which 6,778 have used TER to date. There are 291 local vital statistics registration offices enrolled.

**Average days to register a death prior to TER implementation**  
39.4 days (2005)

**Average days to register a death after TER implementation**  
22.1 days (2009)

**Average days to register ALL ELECTRONIC death records**  
17.1 days (2007)  
16.0 days (2008)  
13.0 days (2009)  
11.2 days (2010) through August

	2007	2008	2009	2010 ytd
<b>Total Records:</b>	165,756	168,613	166,920	103,400
<b># of All Electronic Records:</b>	5,719	31,273	73,222	63,143
<b># of Partially Electronic Records:</b>	30,252	75,861	76,203	35,944
<b>Total % of All Electronic Records :</b>	3.45%	18.50%	43.73%	61.07%
<b>Total % of Both Partially All Electronic Records :</b>	21.70%	63.50%	90%	96%

## FIELD SERVICES GOING VIRTUAL

One of the goals of VSU Field Services is to achieve excellence in vital registration and data quality through training, handling information requests, site visits, conferences and developing materials to support service providers across the state for the benefit of all Texans.

With the vast number of local registrar offices across the State, it is imperative that all service providers remain up to speed on requirements and processes so that collectively we can achieve a standard for quality. Face-to-face site surveys have historically allowed for us at the State to connect with local registrars personally, however, given today's technology and staff considerations, we have created and implemented a virtual site survey that local registrars can take online. It will not replace the site visit, but will inform service providers across the state of the legal standards for data quality and safety while stimulating a dialogue with VSU.

This virtual site survey is a cost-effective and innovative tool that will promote collaboration between State and local offices and will benefit all Texans who visit our offices for vital registration matters.

## VSU NOW ON WIKI!

We are excited to announce the launch of the VSU Field Services Wiki, a user-friendly online encyclopedia dedicated to providing answers and information about processes and FAQs. It is currently in the beginning stages but will be expanding with time. We chose the wiki online format for its ability to expand and for the ability for the public to log in and comment on entries.

You can navigate the wiki by selecting from one of the categories and links listed on each page or by entering a keyword. In order to comment, you will need to login and request a password.

The wiki can be found here: [http://wiki.texasvsu-ed.org/Main\\_Page](http://wiki.texasvsu-ed.org/Main_Page)

This live web project is ongoing and can become a very important reference tool with everyone's participation.

## DSHS READY OR NOT? CAMPAIGN URGES DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The Texas Department of State Health Services along with state and local officials today launched this year's Ready or Not? multi-lingual public education campaign to encourage Texans to prepare for emergencies.

"Whether it's a hurricane, tornado or flood, a disaster can strike when we least expect it, and we want people to be prepared," said Dr. David Lakey, DSHS commissioner. "We're one month into hurricane season, but it's not too late to put together a plan."

Ready or Not? or ¿Estás Listo? in Spanish uses radio, television, newspaper and online advertising; community outreach events; and its websites to encourage every Texan to create an emergency plan now. The goal is to help Texans be ready to respond to, and recover from, any natural or man made disaster.

This year's launch took place at the Island Community Center in Galveston with local officials presenting information about how to prepare. The Galveston event also marked the kickoff

of the 15-city Ready or Not? community outreach tour.

The yearlong Ready or Not? campaign focuses on three key elements: **family, essentials** and **information**.

**Family.** Talk with everyone in your family about your emergency plan. Know where your family will meet if you have to evacuate. Include elderly neighbors and people with disabilities who may depend on you for help. Have a list of emergency contacts. And remember your pets.

**Essentials.** Make a shopping list of essential items you need. Store those emergency supplies in one place. Put copies of all essential documents — driver's license or passport, insurance policies, health cards and prescriptions — in a waterproof bag.

**Information:** Know how to get information in an emergency. Have a battery-operated radio on hand with plenty of fresh batteries.

Ready or Not? partners include local emergency

management officials, community based organizations with emergency preparedness and response/recovery roles, and other grassroots organizations.

The website at [www.TexasPrepares.org](http://www.TexasPrepares.org) or [www.TexasPrepara.org](http://www.TexasPrepara.org) offers people a way to build a custom plan step by step. Those without Internet access may dial 2-1-1 for help finding local sites that offer free Internet access.

The Ready or Not? community outreach tour will hold 18 events in 15 cities this summer beginning today in Galveston. Additional stops are planned throughout the month of July in Pasadena, Port Arthur, Beaumont, Lufkin, League City, Tyler, Houston, Bay City, Victoria, Corpus Christi, Harlingen, Brownsville, McAllen and San Antonio. Each free event will feature a 20-foot by 20-foot tent filled with informational displays, sample disaster supply kits and an interactive kiosk where visitors can begin or continue their emergency planning.

The Ready or Not? campaign will run through August 2011.

Texas Vital Statistics  
Department of State Health Services  
1100 West 49th Street  
Austin, Texas 78756

Periodical Rate  
Austin, Texas

## HELPFUL NUMBERS

1-888-963-7111 Main Number

### ADOPTION

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Lori de Leon 2798

### AMENDMENTS

Belinda Cochran 2668  
Christina Faske 2578

### AOP REGISTRY

Orphetta Lett 2558

### DELAYED RECORDS

Cynthia Brown 2544

### FRAUD

Edward Saucedo 7383  
Teresa Bates 7508

### PATERNITY

Diana Martinez 3224

### PATERNITY REGISTRY

Carolyn Morgan 7782

### REMOTE BIRTH ACCESS

Lisa Martinez 7465  
Alicia Taylor 7467

### TER SUPPORT

Venessa Butts 7377  
Mark Jenkins 2593

### MEDICAL AMENDMENTS, REJECTIONS

Debra Johnson 2549  
Alice Whitley 2515

## VISIT OUR WEBSITES

FOR MORE NEWS AND INFORMATION

### FIELD SERVICES DEPARTMENT

[www.texasvsu.org](http://www.texasvsu.org)

### TER DEATH TRAINING

[www.texasvsu-ed.org](http://www.texasvsu-ed.org)

### TER HELP DESK

[www.help-ter.texasvsu.org](http://www.help-ter.texasvsu.org)

### TEXAS VITAL STATISTICS HANDBOOKS

[www.handbooks.texasvsu.org](http://www.handbooks.texasvsu.org)

### TEXAS VITAL STATISTICS WIKI

<http://wiki.texasvsu-ed.org>

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Commissioner

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