



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

Texas Department of State  
Health Services

# 2025

## **DSHS RESPIRATORY DISEASE CONFERENCE**

***Office of the Chief State Epidemiologist***

JULY 23<sup>RD</sup> – 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2025

# Message from the DSHS Chief State Epidemiologist

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## ***Persevering Together to Adapt and Find Solutions***

This year has seen unprecedented challenges that have tested our capacity to meet new challenges. As epidemiologists and public health professionals, our tireless work in understanding, preventing, and responding to communicable diseases has never been more critical – or more inspiring.

This conference is not just a meeting of subject matter experts; it is a celebration of perseverance, collaboration, and innovation. Every dataset analyzed, every outbreak managed, every community engagement effort – each is a testament to our unwavering commitment to the wellbeing of Texans.

Let this time together renew your sense of purpose, spark new ideas, and deepen the connections that drive our field forward. In the face of ever-evolving challenges, we stand at the front lines of communicable disease surveillance, outbreak preparedness, and response capabilities.

Over the next couple of days, we aim to highlight current activities in influenza and respiratory virus surveillance, investigations for legionella, and the response to novel influenzas. By identifying best practices in applied epidemiology between respiratory surveillance programs from local and regional public health teams around the state we hope to strengthen our relationships and promote new innovations and strategies for disease surveillance.

Thank you for your experiences, your insight, and your passion. The health of Texans is better because of us – and it's better when we work together.

## ***Welcome to the 2025 Flu and Respiratory Disease Conference!***



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

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

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## WEDNESDAY, JULY 23<sup>RD</sup>, 2025 Schedule Summary

Time	DSHS Lab		
<b>10:00</b>		<b>Lab Tour 1</b>	
10:15			
<b>10:30</b>			
10:45			
<b>11:00</b>			
11:15			
<b>11:30</b>			

	Balcones		
1:00		Operation Silent Strain: Respiratory Response Readiness Tabletop Exercise and Activity	
1:15			
1:30			
1:45			
2:00			
2:15			
2:30			
2:45	Break		
3:00		Operation Silent Strain: Respiratory Response Readiness Tabletop Exercise and Activity	
3:15			
3:30			
3:45			
4:00			
4:15			
4:30			
4:45			
5:00			

## WEDNESDAY, JULY 23<sup>RD</sup>, 2025 Sessions

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### 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lab Tour 1

DSHS Lab

We are excited to offer tours of the State Lab along with the conference this year! Texas has one of the largest Labs in the country which participants will be guided through to better understand their function.

Tours range from 1 to 1.5 hours and participants will be responsible for securing their own transportation to the DSHS Central Campus.

Please note: tour groups are limited by size, and priority may be given to registrants who have not previously attended this activity.

### 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Operation Silent Strain: Respiratory Response Readiness Tabletop Exercise and Activity**

BALCONES

This immersive tabletop exercise and simulation is designed for communicable disease epidemiologists with a focus on respiratory pathogens such as influenza, COVID-19, RSV, and novel viruses. Participants will engage in an outbreak response scenario that challenges their skills in case detection, public health messaging, interagency coordination, public health follow-up, and mass prophylaxis planning. Through collaborative problem-solving, this session will enhance situational awareness, data-driven decision making, and operational preparedness. Ideal for professionals aiming to sharpen their response capacity during respiratory outbreaks, this exercise bridges epidemiologic theory with rapid, community-centered action.



*Whitney Tillman, MPH  
Manager III  
DSHS EAIDU VPD*



*Luis Valenzuela  
Jurisdictional Preparedness Support  
Coordinator  
DSHS Health Emergency Preparedness  
Response*

# THURSDAY, JULY 24<sup>TH</sup>, 2025 Schedule Summary

Time	Lil' Tex		Balcones		Stadium	
8:00	Registration & Check In					
8:15						
8:30						
8:45						
9:00		Opening Plenary: Dr. Carol Davis, RLHO				
9:15						
9:30						
9:45						
10:00		Respiratory Outbreaks: Emerging Threats, Lessons Learned, and the Future of Epidemiology Response				
10:15						
10:30						
10:45						
11:00						
11:15						
11:30	Meningococcal Outbreak Case Study	Linking Environment and Infection in Legionellosis		Updates on RSV Prevention in Infants		
11:45						
12:00						
12:15	Lunch Break, open floor networking					
12:30						
12:45						
1:00						
1:15						
1:30						
1:45	H2-OH No! Preventing Recreational Waterborne Diseases	Respiratory Vaccine Administration and Coverage Data		TxS2 for Respiratory Disease Surveillance		
2:00						
2:15						
2:30						
2:45	Break					
3:00		From Plumbing to Patients: Strengthening Legionnaires' Disease Surveillance and Response				
3:15						
3:30						
3:45						
4:00						
4:15		Measles on the Move: Rapid Fire, Rash Results				
4:30						
4:45						
5:00						

## THURSDAY, JULY 24<sup>TH</sup>, 2025 Sessions

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### 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Opening Plenary

LIL' TEX

This session will describe how international assessments on influenza surveillance are conducted and what it is like working as an assessor. Personal observations of public health and key takeaways of working with respiratory infectious diseases will also be shared.



*Carol Davis, DrPH, MSPH, CPH  
Deputy Regional Director  
Texas Department of State Health  
Services Region 7*

### 10:10 a.m. – 11:10 a.m. Respiratory Outbreaks: Emerging Threats, Lessons Learned, and the Future of Epidemiology Response

LIL' TEX

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#### From Detection to Containment: Managing Respiratory Outbreaks

This presentation will address the process of managing respiratory illness outbreaks using modern methods. Information provided will cover outbreak response processes, best practices, and lessons learned from a season with an unprecedented number of influenza outbreaks in Tarrant County.



*Dan Luong, MPH  
Flu Surveillance Specialist  
Tarrant County Public Health*

#### Local Respiratory Outbreak Surveillance

This session will provide information on the surveillance methods used at Harris County Public Health for detecting levels of respiratory activity during the Flu Season. Highlights will include lessons learned and challenges faced with handling respiratory outbreaks at a correctional facility and a long-term care facility.



*Shehzana Hussaini, MS  
Epidemiologist  
Harris County Public Health, OESED*

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**11:15 a.m. – 12:00 a.m. Updates on RSV Prevention in Infants Stadium**

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During this session we will briefly review the epidemiology, burden, and risk factors associated with severe RSV disease in infants. We will discuss new and emerging RSV immunization strategies and updated recommendations for the prevention of RSV in infants, including monoclonal antibodies and maternal vaccination. We will utilize evidence-based guidelines to determine appropriate RSV immunization strategies for individual patients.



*Flor Munoz, MD  
Associate Professor of Pediatrics,  
Infectious Diseases  
Baylor College of Medicine Molecular  
Virology and Microbiology*

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**11:20 a.m. – 12:05 a.m. Linking Environment and Infection in Legionellosis Balcones**

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This session will provide an in-depth look at a Legionellosis case where environmental testing provided key evidence linking a human infection to a source, reinforcing the importance of interagency collaboration and regulatory support in preventing further illness.



*Amy Gonzalez, MPH  
Epidemiologist III - Lead Epidemiologist  
Hidalgo County Health and Human  
Services*

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**11:30 a.m. – 12:15 a.m. Meningococcal Outbreak Case Study Lil Tex**

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This session will discuss an outbreak of meningococcal meningitis in Houston including initial reporting, outbreak identification, and immediate and long-term public health intervention and response. It will touch on coordination with partners and stakeholders, communication, post-exposure prophylaxis, vaccination, and community education.



*Kirstin Short, MPH  
Bureau Chief, Epidemiology  
Houston Health Department*

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**12:15 a.m – 1:45 p.m. LUNCH BREAK & Open Floor Networking**

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**1:45 p.m. – 2:30 p.m**

**H2-OH No! Preventing Recreational  
Waterborne Diseases**

**Lil Tex**

This presentation will explore recreational water safety in the context of invasive and respiratory infections, with a focus on pathogens such as *Legionella* and *Naegleria fowleri*. Special attention will be given to non-complex potable water systems, such as those found in recreational vehicles (RVs), including risk factors, prevention strategies, and public health recommendations to reduce exposure. Attendees will gain practical insights for promoting safer water practices among RV users.



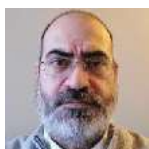
*Olivia Smith, PhD, MPH  
Epidemiologist III  
DSHS EAIDU IRID*

**1:55 p.m. – 2:40 p.m**

**Respiratory Vaccine Administration and  
Coverage Data**

**Stadium**

In this session we will explore current trends and challenges in respiratory vaccine administration and coverage, with a focus on data collection, reporting systems, and strategies to improve uptake for vaccines across diverse populations.



*Greg Leos, MPH  
Director II  
DSHS Immunizations*

**2:05 p.m. – 2:50 p.m**

**TxS2 for Respiratory Disease Surveillance**

**Balcones**

This presentation will provide a basic overview of syndromic surveillance, the TxS2 ESSENCE platform and strengths and limitations of using syndromic data. In addition, this presentation will provide an overview of visits related to respiratory diseases reported by TxS2 participating facilities.



*Teniola Balogun, MPH  
Texas Syndromic Surveillance (TxS2)  
Epidemiologist II  
DSHS RLHO Analytics and Information  
Management Unit*

**3:05 p.m. – 4:05 p.m**

**From Plumbing to Patients: Strengthening  
Legionnaires' Disease Surveillance and  
Response**

**Lil' Tex**

This presentation will review basic ecology, current national trends, and describe best practices for surveillance and outbreak response, with a particular focus on healthcare and other commonly encountered investigation settings.



*Jessica Smith, MPH  
Epidemiologist  
CDC*

**4:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m**

**Measles on the Move: Rapid Fire, Rash  
Results**

**Lil' Tex**

The Measles Rapid Fire: Rash Results Panel session is a high-energy, rapid-fire panel where state, local, and regional subject matter experts share real-time insights from the ongoing measles outbreak. In this fast-paced session, each speaker will deliver a focused 5-minute spotlight on their jurisdiction's response in which they will be covering outbreak detection, case containment, public messaging, vaccination challenges, and cross-agency coordination. The audience should expect sharp takeaways, practical strategies, and candid reflections on what worked, what didn't, and how we can be better prepared in the future.



*Sadia Almas, MPH  
Epidemiologist II  
DSHS PHR 1 Preparedness & Response  
Section, Epidemiology Program*



*Elise Huebner, MS, CPH, CIC  
Epidemiology Team Lead, Vaccine  
Preventable Diseases  
DSHS EAIDU*



*Greg Leos, MPH  
Director II  
DSHS Immunizations*



*Maria Nolen, BS Microbiology  
Virology and Immunology Branch  
Manager  
DSHS Lab*

## FRIDAY, JULY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2025 Schedule Summary

Time	Lil' Tex	Balcones	Stadium
<b>8:00</b>	<b>Registration &amp; Check In</b>		
8:15			
<b>8:30</b>	<b>How Models and Forecasts Can Support Outbreak</b>	<b>Legionellosis: Mitigation and Case Investigation Strategies</b>	<b>Vaccine Elicited Immunity in Early Life</b>
8:45			
<b>9:00</b>			
9:15			
<b>9:30</b>	<b>Development of an Interactive Respiratory Illness</b>	<b>MERS-CoV in Focus: Epidemiology, U.S. Preparedness, and</b>	<b>The Burden of Influenza: Fatalities and</b>
9:45			
<b>10:00</b>			
10:15			
<b>10:30</b>	<b>Break</b>		
10:45	<b>Closing Plenary: Krista Kniss, CDC</b>		
<b>11:00</b>			
11:15			
<b>11:30</b>			
11:45			

	DSHS Lab	
<b>1:30</b>	<b>Lab Tour 2</b>	
1:45		
<b>2:00</b>		
2:15		
<b>2:30</b>		
2:45		
<b>3:00</b>		

## FRIDAY, JULY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2025 Sessions

8:30 a.m. – 9:25 a.m

### Legionellosis: Mitigation and Case Investigation Strategies

Balcones

Effective prevention strategies, such as implementing a water management plan, can assist in managing the growth and spread of *Legionella* bacteria in water systems. This presentation will review the components of a water management plan as a proactive strategy and appropriate response protocols during an epidemiological investigation.



*Brittany Johnson, M.S. Chemistry  
Water Risk Management Specialist  
Chem-Aqua, Inc.*



*Kyle Starr  
Pall Medical*

8:35 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

### How Models and Forecasts can Support Outbreak Responses

Lil Tex

This session will highlight modeling tools and products developed to support recent public health responses from measles to respiratory virus season and encompassing both qualitative and quantitative outputs, with a focus on how each model informed public health action.



*Rebecca Kahn, PhD, MS  
Center for Forecasting and Outbreak  
Analytics, Inform Division, Analytic  
Products Team Lead  
CDC*

8:40 a.m. – 9:25 a.m

### Vaccine Elicited Immunity in Early Life

Stadium

Infants are at higher risk for severe disease caused by respiratory pathogens such as influenza and SARS-CoV-2, however vaccines that protect against these pathogens are unavailable to children under the age of three months. This is partially due to potential inhibition by maternal antibody which play a critical role in mitigating disease in infancy. Clinical trials of new vaccines typically exclude participants who are pregnant or nursing, creating a gap our understanding of vaccine elicited immunity in the pre-natal and peri-natal period. Our goal is to develop infant immunization strategies that elicit robust immune responses in the presence of maternal antibody. In a cross-sectional study of children immunized with EUA SARS-CoV-2 vaccines, we found that infants produced robust humoral responses despite age and weight at immunization. These findings were recapitulated in a mouse model.



*Caitlin Williams, PhD, MS  
Postdoctoral Associate in Pediatrics  
Weill Cornell Medical College*

**9:35 a.m. – 10:20 a.m**

**The Burden of Influenza: Fatalities and Severe Clinical Presentations**

**Stadium**

This session will examine trends and surveillance findings related to influenza-associated pediatric mortality and influenza-associated encephalopathy. The presenter will discuss clinical presentations, case definitions, and the public health implications of severe pediatric outcomes during influenza seasons.



*Alison Bridendolph, MPH  
Epidemiologist III  
DSHS EAIDU VPD*

**9:40 a.m. – 10:25 a.m**

**MERS-CoV in Focus: Epidemiology, U.S. Preparedness, and Public Health Response**

**Balcones**

This presentation will provide a brief overview of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), including its epidemiology, risk factors, symptoms, transmission, global surveillance and notable outbreaks. It will also touch on MERS during the COVID-19 pandemic, and its pandemic potential. In addition, the presentation will outline public health guidelines for managing persons under investigations (PUIs), including MERS testing capacity in the U.S., testing criteria, reporting procedures, and a brief overview of how potential cases are managed.



*J. Bradford Bertumen, MD, MPH  
Medical Officer, Epidemiologist  
CDC, National Center for Immunization  
and Respiratory Diseases*

**9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m**

**Development of an Interactive Respiratory Illness Dashboard in Texas**

**Lil Tex**

Respiratory illnesses like COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can lead to serious outcomes, including hospitalizations and death, and can cause severe strain on the healthcare system. In November 2023, a Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) interdisciplinary team developed the Texas Respiratory Illnesses Interactive Dashboard, including COVID-19, influenza, and RSV. This presentation will provide an overview of the dashboard, including a demonstration, methods, public health significance, and limitations.



*Angie Benedetto, MPH, CIC  
Epidemiologist III, Data Team Lead  
DSHS HSU, Data & Training Group*

### **10:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. Closing Plenary**

**Lil' Tex**

The session will focus on national novel and seasonal influenza surveillance and response. The session will focus and use the H5N1 response as an example.



*Krista Kniss, MPH  
Epidemiologist  
CDC*

### **1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. LAB TOUR 2**

**DSHS Lab**

We are excited to offer tours of the State Lab along with the conference this year! Texas has one of the largest Labs in the country which participants will be guided through to better understand their function.

Tours range from 1 to 1.5 hours and participants will be responsible for securing their own transportation to the DSHS Central Campus.

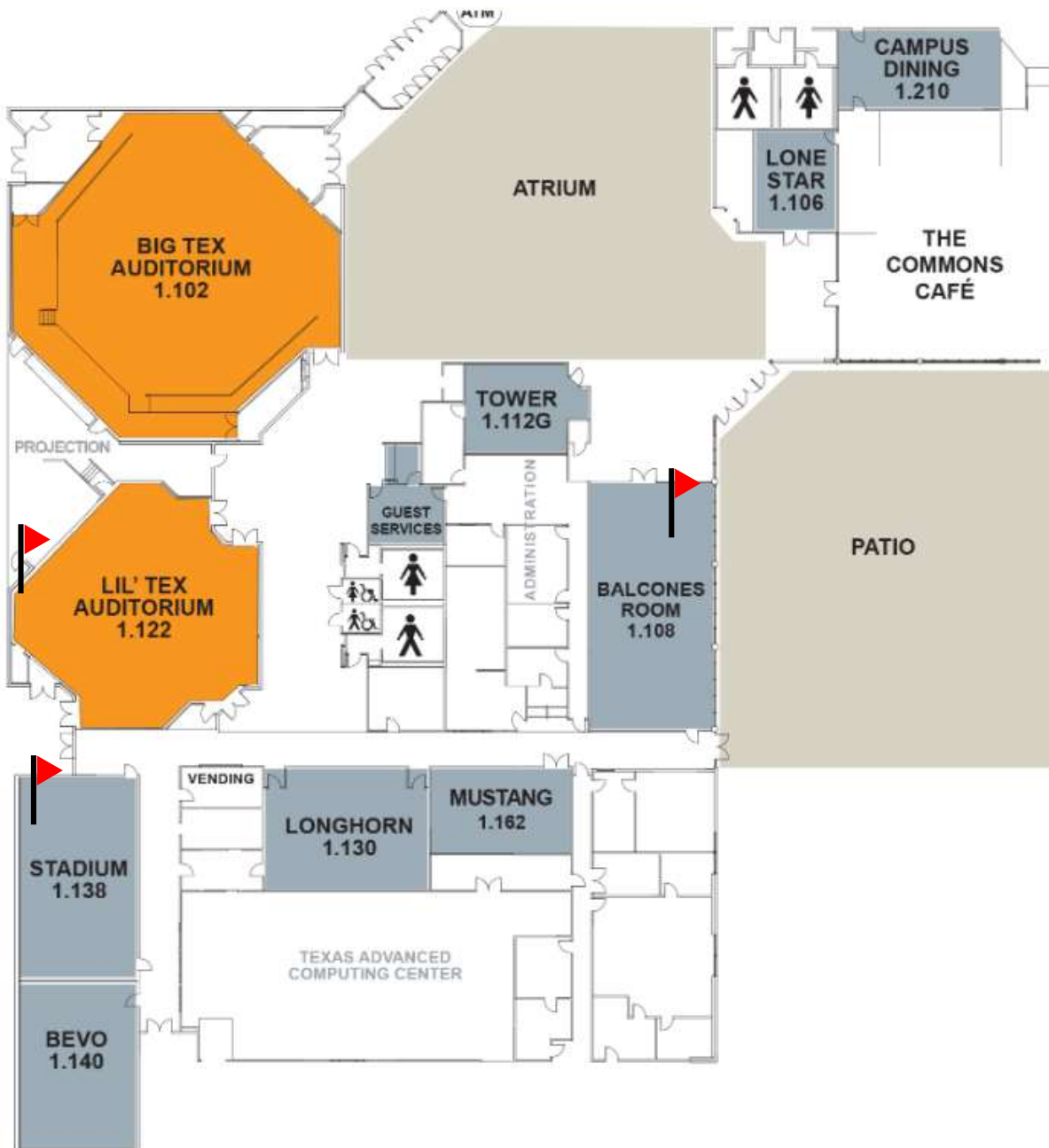
Please note: tour groups are limited by size, and priority may be given to registrants who have not previously attended this activity.

## 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/>.





# Laboratory Tours

The DSHS Public Health Laboratory is one of the largest in the country. We are excited to be able to offer tours during the conference dates. Tours range from 1-1.5 hours during which attendees can see different areas of the lab and better understand their function.

## Location:

The Laboratory is located at 1100 W. 49th Street, Austin, TX 78756. The entrance of the laboratory faces south, toward the parking garage. You can identify the laboratory by the multiple "chimney like" structures on the roof. It is also roped around the perimeter. Please be aware there is construction surrounding the laboratory building, however, you can still enter through the main entrance.

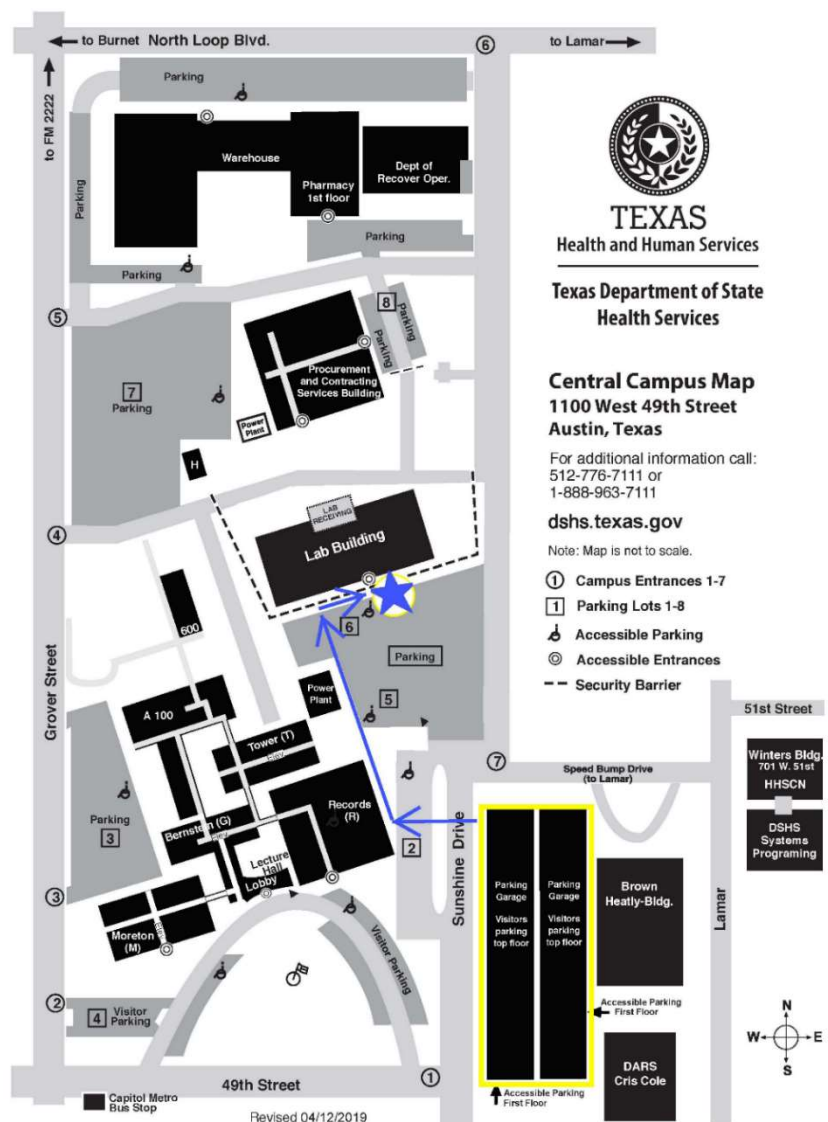
## Parking:

Attendees are responsible for securing their own transportation to the DSHS Central Campus. The lab is a short drive from the conference facility (5 miles or about 15 minutes by car). **The listed tour times do not include travel time to the lab** so please plan accordingly to arrive on time. Visitor parking is located on the upper floors of the two parking garages located at the corner of Sunshine and Speed Bump Drives.

## Tour Information:

Tours will meet in the lab lobby where you will need to check in with security. Once everyone checks in, the tour will begin. The laboratory is a high security facility, so there are a few requirements that may be different than what you are familiar with. Please be aware of the following:

- Be sure to bring a valid ID or driver's license for entry into the lab.
- Wear closed-toed shoes.
- Be aware that you are required to always have an escort while in the lab, so please stay with your group. If you need to leave early, please let your guide know so they can arrange for an escort.
- No food or drink allowed.
- No pictures allowed.





## PHR & EAIDU Contact Information

### Public Health Contact Directory

#### Directory of DSHS Public Health Region Epidemiology Teams

Public Health Region	Main Phone	Epidemiology Team Email
Public Health Region 1	(806) 744-3577	<a href="mailto:PHR1.EpiReporting@dshs.texas.gov">PHR1.EpiReporting@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Public Health Region 2/3	(817) 264-4500	<a href="mailto:HSR2-3.EpiReporting@dshs.texas.gov">HSR2-3.EpiReporting@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Public Health Region 4/5N	(903) 533-3585	<a href="mailto:Region4-5epi@dshs.texas.gov">Region4-5epi@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Public Health Region 6/5S	(713) 767-3000	<a href="mailto:HSR65.EPI@dshs.texas.gov">HSR65.EPI@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Public Health Region 7	(254) 778-6744	<a href="mailto:HSR7.EPI@dshs.texas.gov">HSR7.EPI@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Public Health Region 8	(210) 949-2000	<a href="mailto:Region8.Epi@dshs.texas.gov">Region8.Epi@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Public Health Region 9/10	(915) 834-7675	<a href="mailto:HSR9-10.PHPReporting@dshs.texas.gov">HSR9-10.PHPReporting@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Public Health Region 11	(956) 423-0130	<a href="mailto:R11EpiReport@dshs.texas.gov">R11EpiReport@dshs.texas.gov</a>

#### Directory of DSHS EAIDU Teams

##### EAIDU Team

##### Team Email

Data Requests	<a href="mailto:EAIDU.DataRequests@dshs.texas.gov">EAIDU.DataRequests@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Foodborne & Waterborne Diseases	<a href="mailto:FoodborneTexas@dshs.texas.gov">FoodborneTexas@dshs.texas.gov</a>
High Consequence Infectious Diseases	<a href="mailto:EAIDUMonitoring@dshs.texas.gov">EAIDUMonitoring@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Influenza, ILI, and RSV	<a href="mailto:FLUTexas@dshs.texas.gov">FLUTexas@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Invasive Respiratory Infectious Diseases	<a href="mailto:IRID@dshs.texas.gov">IRID@dshs.texas.gov</a>
Vaccine Preventable Diseases	<a href="mailto:VPDTexas@dshs.texas.gov">VPDTexas@dshs.texas.gov</a>

*On behalf of the planning team, thank you to all staff, attendees, speakers, and partners who contributed to the success of this event. We are grateful for your time, insight, expertise, and commitment to public health in Texas.*

*Please consider taking a few minutes to complete our evaluation survey so we can continue to improve on this conference.*



## 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)**