

# 2025

# ANNUAL REPORT

FIELD NOTES FROM A YEAR IN  
PUBLIC HEALTH REGION 8



**TEXAS**

Health and Human Services

**DSHS South Central Texas**

*Public Health Region 8 Serving You*

**Texas Department of State  
Health Services**

# CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

REGIONAL PROGRAMS & SERVICES

DISEASE INVESTIGATION

DISASTER RESPONSE

TB CARE

COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

VACCINATION

SOCIAL SERVICES

HIV & STD TREATMENT

BORDER HEALTH

FOOD INSPECTION

ANIMAL-BORNE DISEASE

CONTACT INFORMATION

REGIONAL OFFICE LOCATIONS

# MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Public health protects and improves community health by promoting wellness, identifying and treating infectious diseases, responding to natural and human-made disasters, and working with our local partners to identify and respond to public health concerns.

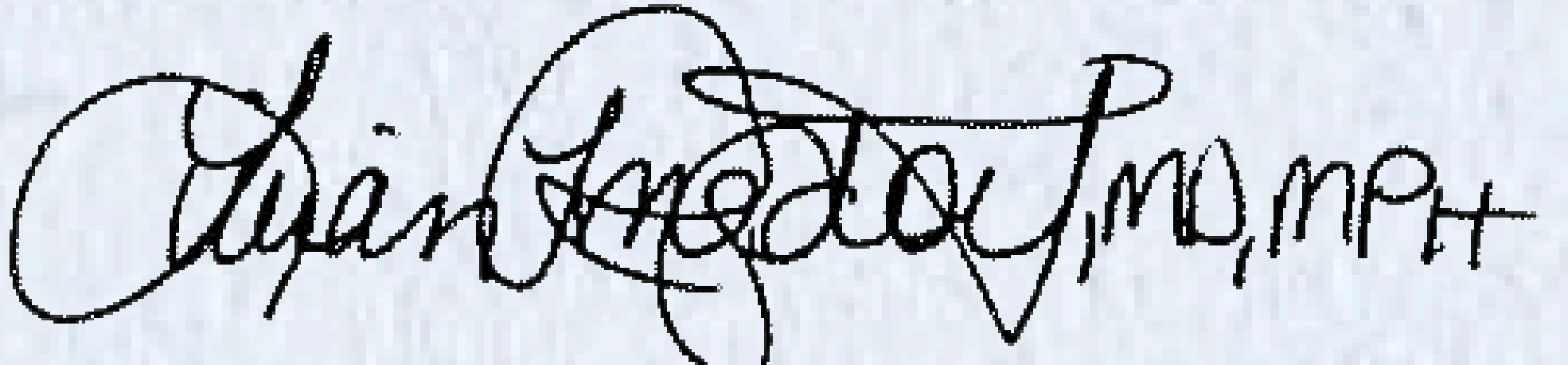
DSHS Public Health Region 8 serves South Central Texas and covers 28 counties. Our headquarters is in San Antonio, and we operate 15 field offices throughout our area.

Our 2025 Annual Report highlights public health activities, events, and responses that occurred over the past year. We are reformatting our approach in this year's report to provide you with succinct information about the work we do, with links that take you to more detailed descriptions.

## **This year's highlights include:**

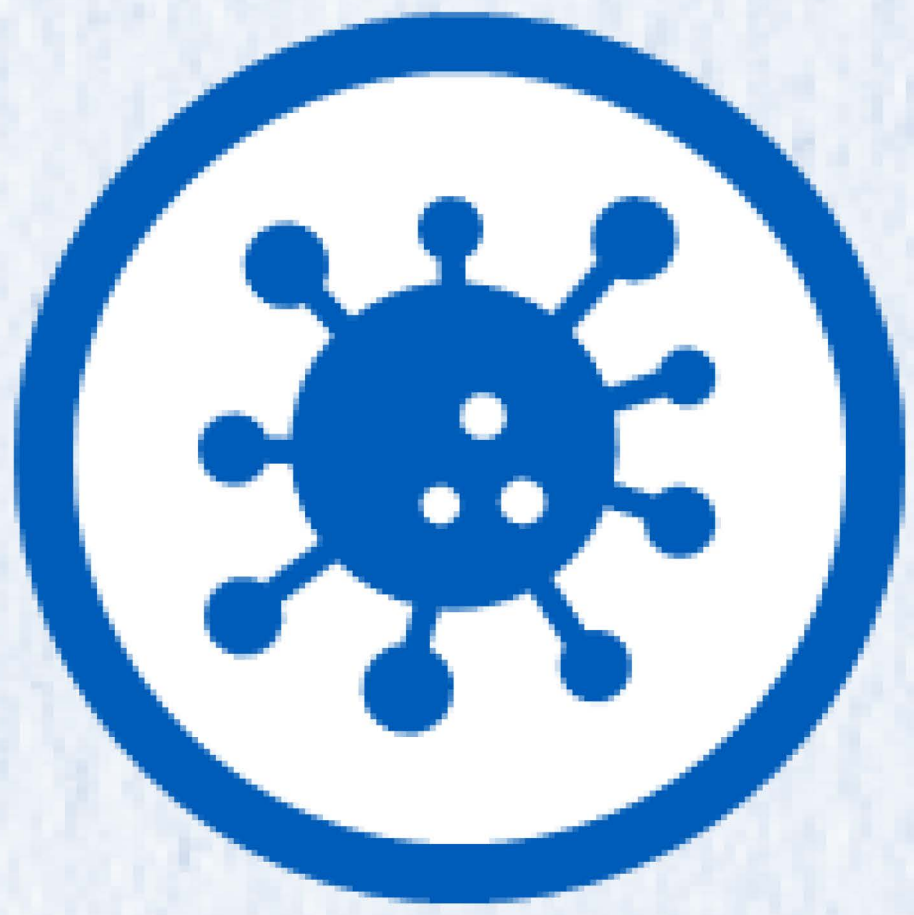
- working with correctional facilities to manage tuberculosis and prevent its spread to surrounding communities
- connecting low-income children with disabilities to health care providers
- making sure no pregnant woman passes syphilis to her unborn baby
- educating residents about the risks of new world screw worm and its potential dangers to animals
- and working with local, state and federal officials after the July 4 flood of the Guadalupe River

These are only a few of our activities during 2025. Please reach out to us with your comments or questions. We look forward to hearing from you!

— 

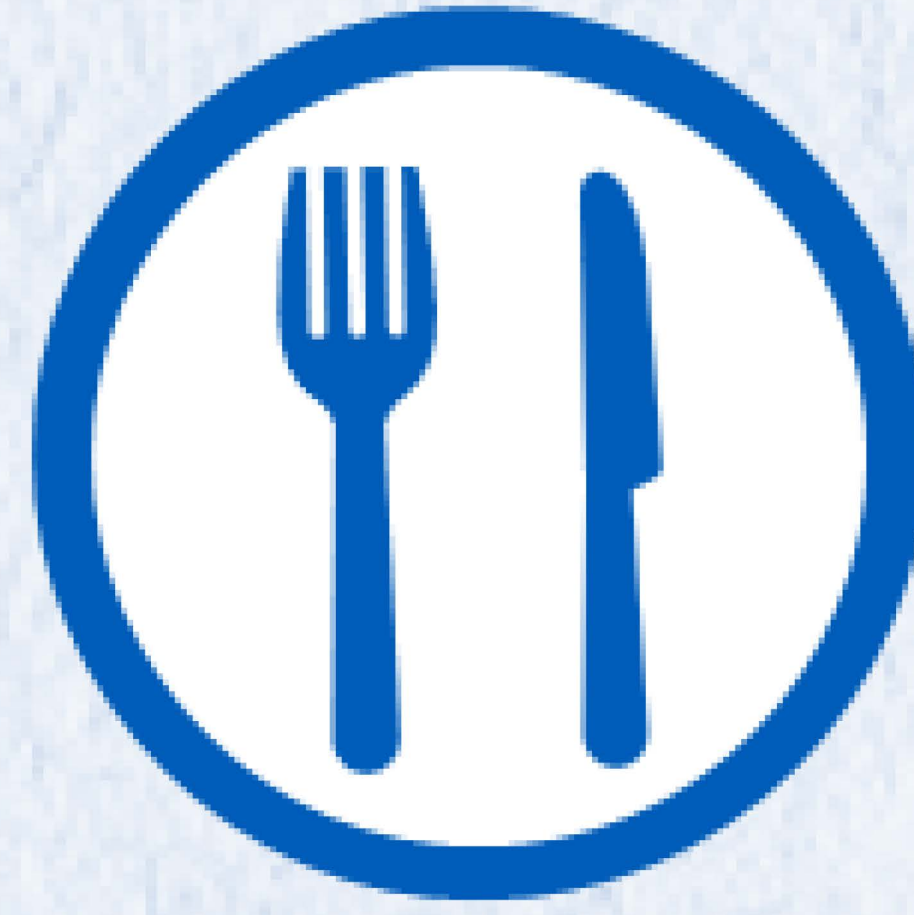
Dr. Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH  
Regional Medical Director

# THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



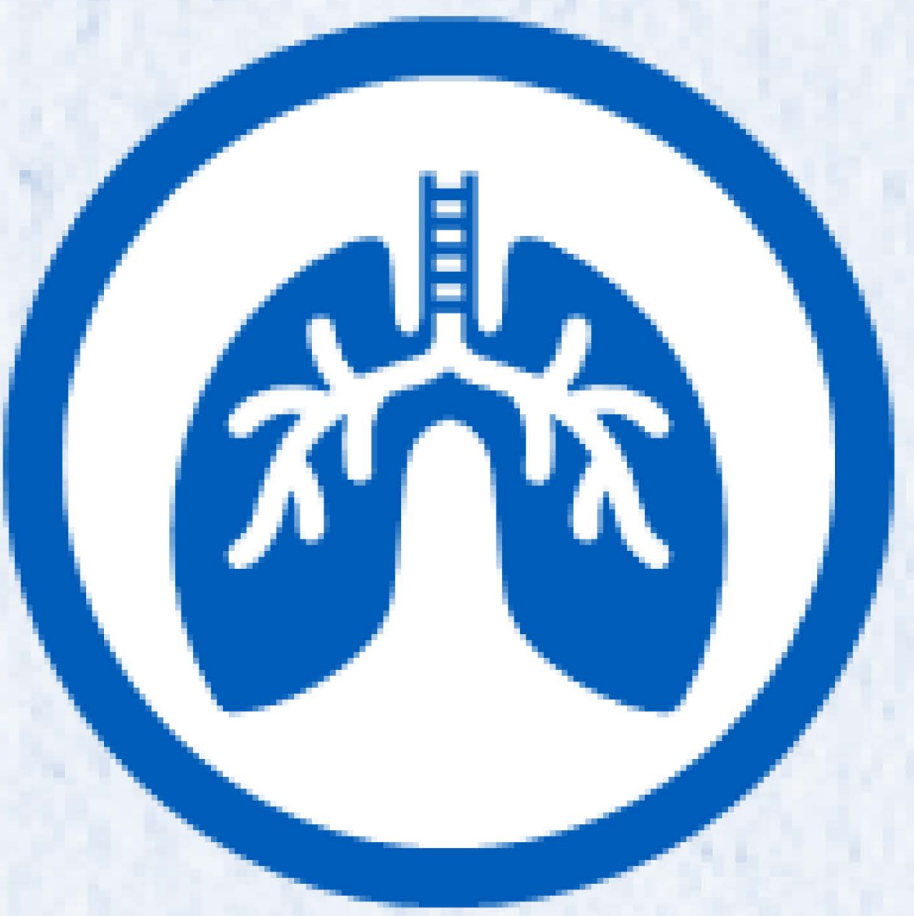
**3494**

DISEASE INVESTIGATIONS



**477**

FOOD AND CAFETERIA  
INSPECTIONS



**554**

TUBERCULOSIS DISEASE  
INVESTIGATIONS



**918**

CLIENTS CONNECTED TO  
SOCIAL SERVICES



**529**

ORAL HEALTH EVALUATIONS



**403**

HEALTH CARE PROVIDER  
VISITS



**161**

RABIES INVESTIGATIONS



**3446**

VACCINES  
ADMINISTERED

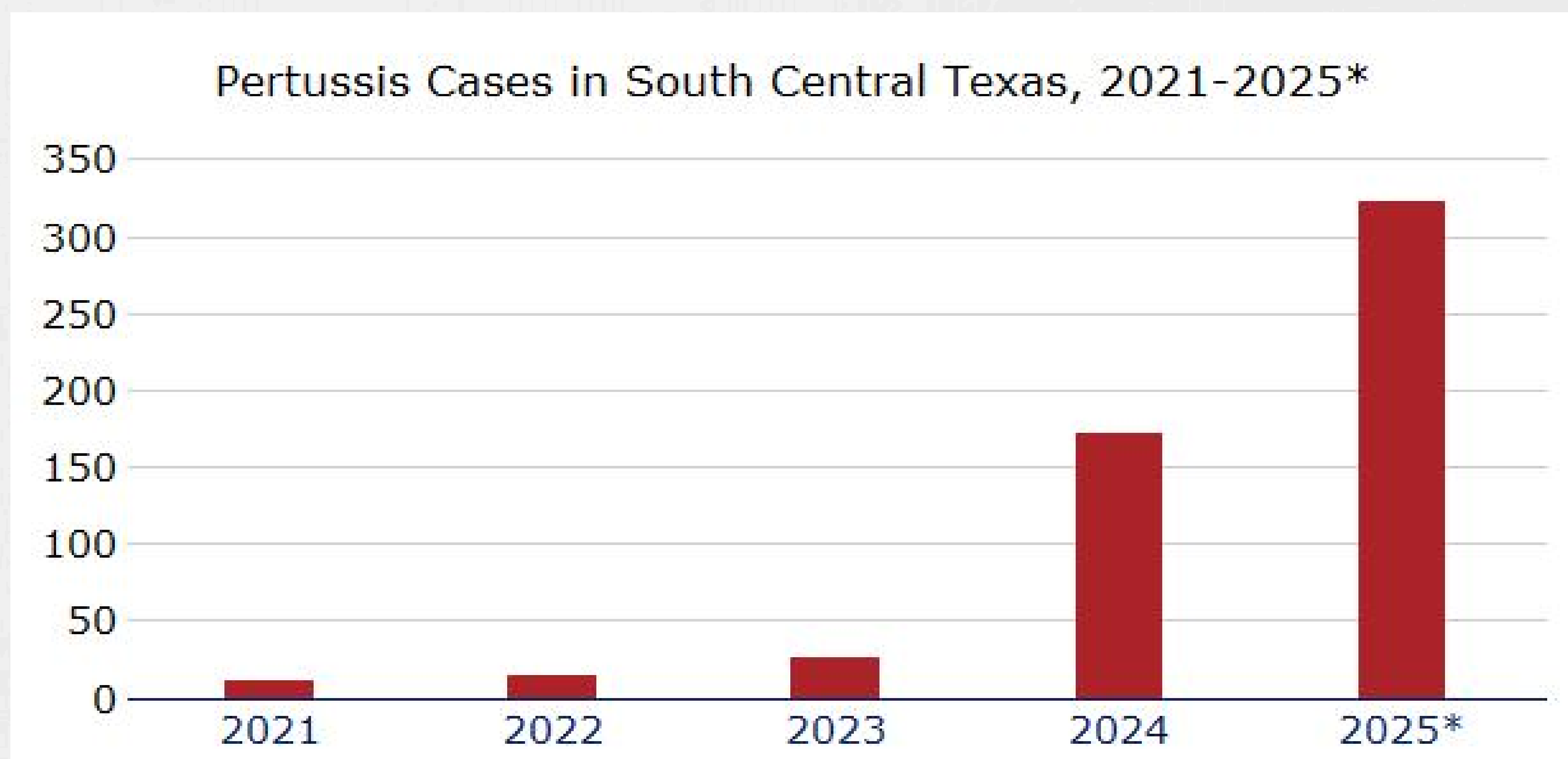
# REGIONAL PROGRAMS & SERVICES

## DISEASE INVESTIGATION

### Whooping Cough on the Rise

Over the past few years, local, state, and national public health agencies have reported large increases in the number of cases of whooping cough.

**Cases of whooping cough in South Central Texas have increased every year since 2021.**



Whooping cough (pertussis) is a very contagious disease. Whooping cough is spread when a sick person coughs or sneezes, and the people near them breathe in the bacteria. It is especially dangerous to babies, who are at risk of life-threatening diseases such as pneumonia if they are infected with whooping cough.

The best way to prevent whooping cough is to stay up to date on vaccines. The vaccine for whooping cough also protects against diphtheria and tetanus. **CDC recommends whooping cough vaccines for babies, children, preteens and adults – and during pregnancy.** Talk to your doctor to make sure you are up to date and protected.

For more information about whooping cough, visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncird/whats-new/cases-of-whooping-cough-on-the-rise.html>

[Health Alert: Increase in Pertussis Cases in Texas | Texas DSHS](#)

# DISASTER RESPONSE

## Public Health Response to the July 2025 Kerrville Flood

Historic rainfall in Kerr County caused the Guadalupe River to rise more than 27 feet in under an hour, resulting in widespread destruction, large-scale rescues, and significant loss of life. Public Health Region 8 Preparedness and Response team activated early to support local response and recovery efforts. Additionally, Region 8 deployed specialized resources and provided technical expertise in response to the tragedy. Hundreds of first responders from multiple national and international agencies came to Kerrville to help local agencies and volunteers.

Region 8 assisted community members and first responders by opening a Family Assistance Center in collaboration with other agencies, as well as offering tetanus and hepatitis vaccines to reduce secondary public health risks. Integrating physical and behavioral monitoring of responders during the response helped to manage their stress and morale by reinforcing the importance of workforce resilience during prolonged disaster response. Region 8 continues to support Kerr County and partners through ongoing recovery efforts, including environmental health coordination, behavioral health outreach, and youth camp regulatory support.

Region 8 and partners administered nearly **1,800 doses of tetanus and hepatitis A vaccines** to first responders and community members during the response to the flooding.



# TB CARE

## Protecting our Community: TB Control in County Jails

Inmates in county jails come from all walks of life and live in close quarters. As a result, jails can be hotspots for airborne diseases like tuberculosis (TB).

Under Chapter 89 of the Texas Health and Safety code, specific county jails are required to screen inmates for TB. This law is a critical barrier that stops the disease from spreading out of the jails and into our schools, churches, and businesses.

To ensure jails and communities stay safe, correctional facilities screen and test patients according to [the DSHS Tuberculosis Standards for Texas Correctional and Detention Facilities](#).

Correctional facilities in Public Health Region 8 test an average of 90 people a month. Through tuberculosis diagnoses, people will receive the recommended treatment and prevent further spread. DSHS Public Health Region 8 views county sheriffs and jail administrators as key partners in public health. When the jail team screens effectively, they act as the first line of defense for the entire county.

### County Judge and Commissioner's Role

County judges and commissioners support this public health mission by working closely with jail administrators to:

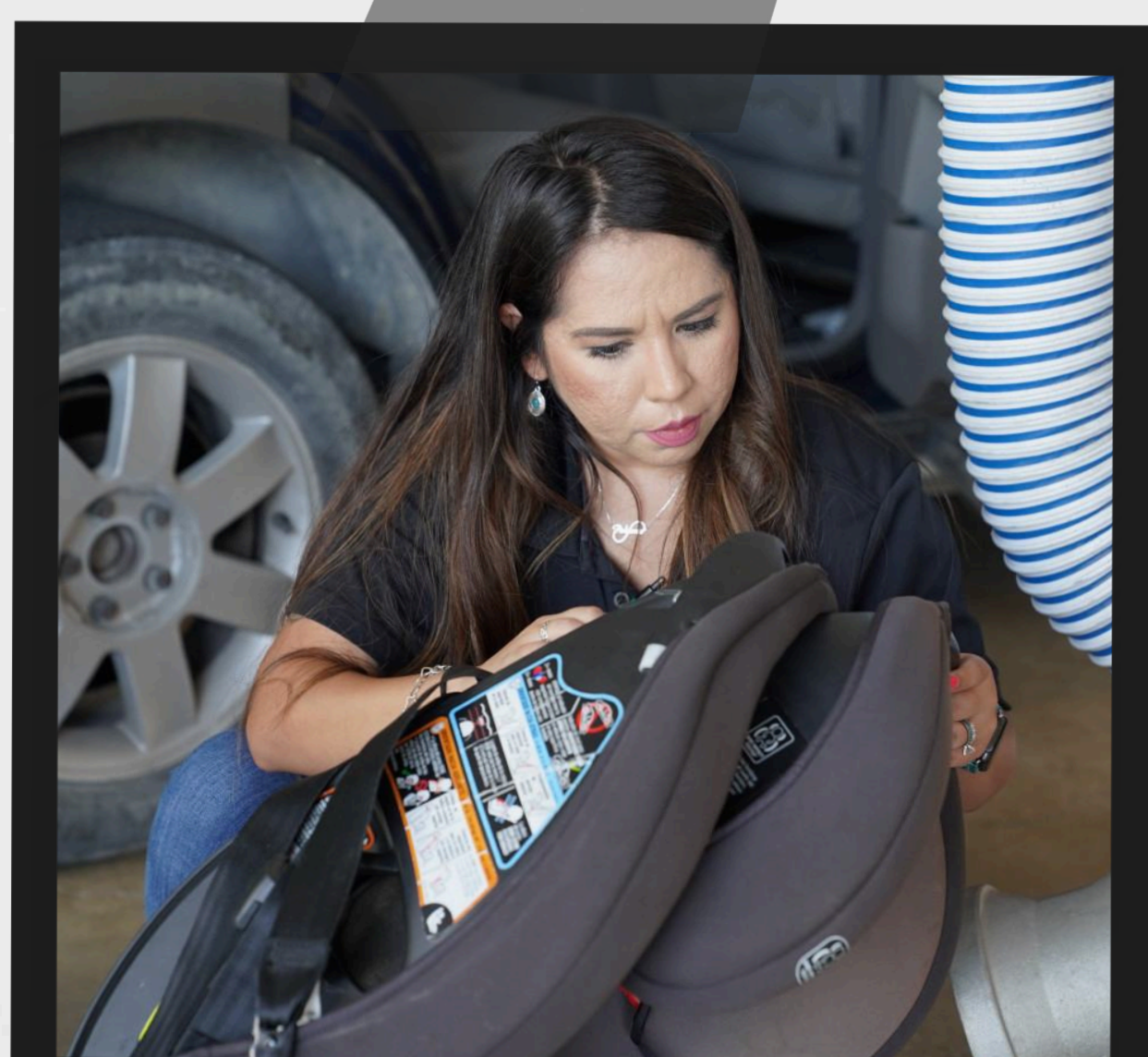
- Verify compliance and assure that the county jail is successfully assessing inmates for signs and symptoms of tuberculosis and testing inmates who stay longer than 7 days.
- Verify reporting by making sure the facility submits monthly reports to DSHS Public Health Region 8.
- Submit an [annual correctional screening plan](#) to [the DSHS TB Program](#).

These actions will help ensure that your county jail remains a safe environment for staff and inmates.

# COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

## Maternal and Child Health

In Region 8, the Community Health Improvement (CHI) team implements strategies to support breastfeeding, safe sleep, child and adolescent injury prevention, healthy eating/active living, and tobacco cessation. The CHI team worked with 37,000 people in educational presentations, community events, meetings and health fairs to address the topics listed in the chart below. They took part in 913 educational and outreach activities focused on Maternal and Child Health, reaching about 37,000 people (see the graph below). These activities included group and one-on-one educational presentations, community events, meetings, coalitions, and health fairs. The team also provided essential public health services such as immunizations, STD testing, and service referrals.



Inspecting carseats at a Del Rio event during Child Passenger Safety Week



Helping check carseats for proper fit and installation during Child Passenger Safety Week



Teaching visitors about heat safety at Hellettsville Library

# VACCINATION

## Promoting and Educating on the Importance and Safety of All Vaccines

We work with Texas Vaccines for Children providers – community doctors who provide free vaccines to eligible children – to ensure easy access to vaccines in our communities, and we serve as a reliable source for accurate vaccine information.

### 2025 QUICK HITS:

- **TEXAS MEASLES OUTBREAK:**  
762 cases, 99 hospitalizations, 2 deaths
- **4x HIGHER:**  
number of pertussis cases in 2025 vs. 2024
- **2.34%:**  
conscientious exemption rates for K-12 students in the 2024-2025 school year

# SOCIAL SERVICES

The Specialized Health and Social Services Program (SHSS) helps clients complete their applications for the Children with Special Health Care Needs program and trains our stakeholders that assist with applications.

- **CLIENT ASSISTANCE:**
  - home visits to help the client or family member gather necessary documents
  - client screening for Personal Care Services, Community First Choice, and Case Management.
- **STAKEHOLDER TRAINING:**
  - review of policy and procedures
  - in-depth review of application requirements

For more information, please contact SHSS at 210-949-2000.

# HIV & STD TREATMENT

## PHR8 HIV/STD Team Adds a Dedicated Congenital Syphilis Nurse to the Program

Our HIV/STD team will expand to 8 positions with the addition of a Congenital Syphilis (CS) Nurse! With a bigger team, there will be more opportunities to prevent syphilis in the community. We will hold targeted screening events, conduct case investigations, perform community outreach, and provide syphilis treatment in the field. The Congenital Syphilis Nurse is new to the region and will focus on removing barriers to treatment by giving injectable Bicillin in the field to pregnant women who are infected with syphilis. Additionally, the nurse will refer women to prenatal care and other resources.

The CS nurse will specialize in the treatment of syphilis for:

- patients who are currently pregnant or recently delivered a baby
- women of childbearing age
- current household partners of these women



**The Region 8 HIV/STD nurse gave more than 145 injections of Bicillin over the last 12 months, helping to keep babies from getting syphilis.**

# BORDER HEALTH

## Maverick County Community Garden Project

Region 8's Office of Border Public Health (OBPH) partnered with Maverick County and the City of Eagle Pass to build community gardens. These gardens promote healthy eating and improve physical health. The Maverick County Nutrition Center (MCNC) and San Luis Center (SLC) community gardens have helped residents by increasing access to fresh fruits, herbs, and vegetables, and by providing a space for participants to engage in physical activity. The gardens have also become an outlet for participants to practice mental health strategies that reduce stress and anxiety.



Garden beds at the Maverick County Nutrition Center located at the Maverick County Lake

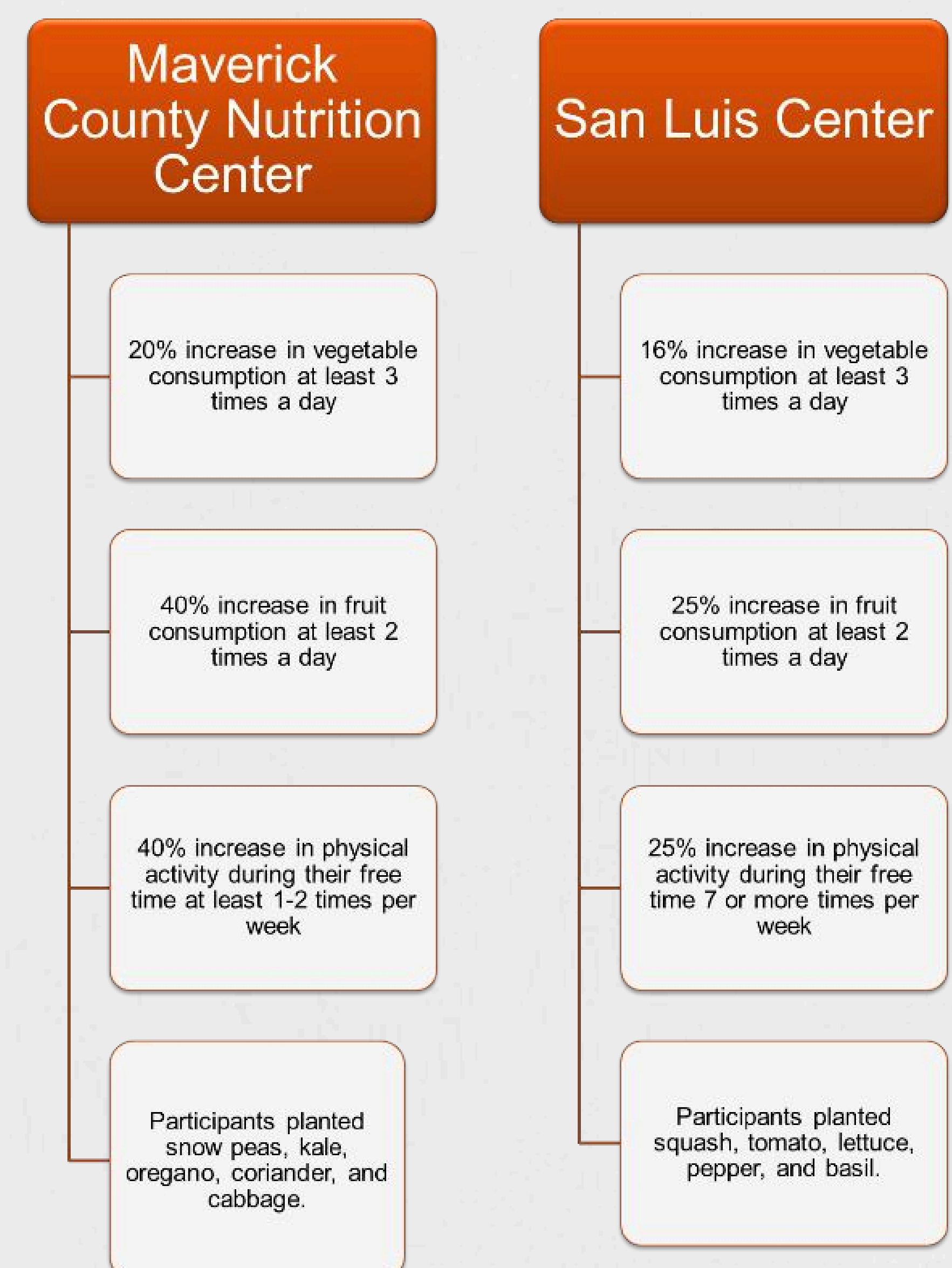


Participants at MCNC painting 'Rock Garden Markers' to keep track of crops planted in the garden beds

As part of the project, our staff led 12 educational sessions at the two sites. Lessons included how to read a seed packet, planting seasonal crops, hardening zones, gardening materials and equipment, and harvesting. Participants also painted rocks to serve as plant labels and to make the gardens more festive. Other activities included planting and transferring plotted plants to garden beds, painting pots for seeds, playing garden bingo, and preparing recipes.

The people who attended the classes planted cabbage, snow peas, coriander, kale, squash, tomatoes, lettuce, peppers, and basil. They completed pre- and post-assessments to see how the classes affected their behavior. Results showed that participants increased their fruit and vegetable consumption, and the amount of time they were physically active.

Community gardens at the Maverick County Nutrition Center and the San Luis Center have had positive impacts on the health and wellbeing of local community members. Participants at the MCNC and SLC continue planting and harvesting crops as part of their regular center activities.



Results from pre- and post-assessments at each of the centers

# FOOD INSPECTION

The 89th Legislative Session brought big changes for the Retail Food and Public Sanitation Programs. In the regular session, the legislature passed both Senate Bill 1008 and House Bill 2844, which require DSHS to expand the licensing duties for food establishments. SB 1008 requires local health departments to submit fee schedules to DSHS for publication online. House Bill 2844 requires mobile food vendors to have one statewide license rather than multiple licenses from local jurisdictions. Another bill that passed was Senate Bill 541, which expands the types of allowable foods for a cottage food production operation. During the Second Called Legislative Session, Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 1 passed. They require stricter guidelines for youth camps. These changes have led to a reorganization of the Retail Food and Public Health Sanitation programs. The following links will help Texans stay updated on how these bills affect DSHS.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/retail-food-establishments>
- <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/youth-camp-program/laws-rules-youth-camp-program/draft-proposed-rules-youth>

# ANIMAL-BORNE DISEASE

## No Fly Zone: Keeping the New World Screwworm Out of Texas

### What is New World Screwworm?

New World Screwworm (NWS) is a parasitic fly (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) that lays its eggs on warm-blooded animals. Once the eggs hatch, the larvae (maggots) feed on the tissue of the host animal. Unlike most maggots that feed on dead tissue, screwworms eat living tissue. This makes them especially harmful to affected animals. Left untreated, the infestation can create large, deep wounds and may eventually kill the host animal.

### Why is New World Screwworm Important?

Screwworm infestations can occur in livestock, pets, wildlife, and even humans. NWS was previously eradicated from the United States in the 1960s through a successful sterile fly release program. However, outbreaks such as the 2016-2017 detection of NWS in Florida Key deer and recent detections of NWS in Mexico have raised increasing concerns that NWS may re-emerge in the United States. An outbreak could cause devastating animal suffering, threaten our livestock industry, and create extreme economic losses.

### What is Texas Doing to Stop the Spread?

NWS prevention requires a multi-layered approach across animal and human public health systems. The Texas Department of State Health Services works with state and federal partners to support surveillance, diagnostics, and preparedness efforts for NWS detection. Key strategies to prevent northward spread include establishing sterile fly production and release facilities, and enhanced surveillance of imported and domestic livestock along the Texas-Mexico border.



## How Can I Recognize New World Screwworm?

People who live and work with animals play a critical role in early detection of NWS. Prompt recognition and reporting of suspicious cases can prevent NWS from re-establishing in Texas.

Below are some clinical signs of NWS infestation in animals:

- **Non-healing wounds with foul odor**
- **Visible maggots deep within wounds**
- **Severe pain, lethargy, and behavior change**
- **Weight loss, decreased appetite, production loss**

## What Should I Do If I Suspect NWS?

Any suspicious wound with maggot infestation in livestock, pets, or wildlife should be reported immediately. Early detection can make a difference between a controlled case and a statewide outbreak. Larvae can be identified for testing through USDA (for animal cases) and CDC (for human cases).

If you suspect NWS:

- ALL larvae (maggots) found on a suspect case should be killed in ethyl or isopropyl alcohol.
- Do NOT discard maggots on ground or in trash (they can continue to survive and spread).
- For pet or livestock reporting, contact the [Texas Animal Health Commission \(800-550-8242\)](#) and/or your veterinarian.
- For wild animal reporting, contact [Texas Parks and Wildlife \(800-792-1112\)](#).
- For questions on parasite identification or human testing, contact DSHS at [newworldscrewworm@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:newworldscrewworm@dshs.texas.gov)

# CONTACT DSHS

Program	Contact Name	Phone	Email Address
Notifiable Conditions	On-Call Staff	(210) 949-2121	Call to report notifiable conditions or public health emergencies
Community Health Improvement	Katherine Velasquez, RN, PhD	(210) 949-2091	Katherine.Velasquez@dshs.texas.gov
Epidemiology	Elise Rush, MPH, CIC	(210) 949-2095	Elise.Rush@dshs.texas.gov
HIV/STD Program	Lauren Mata, MACMHC	(210) 949-2151	Lauren.Mata@dshs.texas.gov
Immunizations	Laurie Henefey	(830) 591-4386	Laurie.Henefey@dshs.texas.gov
Office of Border Public Health	Rosy De Los Santos	(830) 758-4241	Rosy.Delossantos@dshs.texas.gov
Oral Health Improvement Program	Swapna Jos, DDS	(210) 949-2124	Swapna.Jos@dshs.texas.gov
Preparedness & Response	Sammy Sikes, CHS, EMT-B	(210) 949-2040	Sammy.Sikes@dshs.texas.gov
Retail Foods & Public Health Sanitation	Maricela Zamarripa, RS	(830) 591-4389	Maricela.Zamarripa@dshs.texas.gov
Specialized Health & Social Services	Diane Bernal, LMSW	(210) 949-2147	Diane.Bernal@dshs.texas.gov
Texas Health Steps	David Garcia	(210) 949-2159	DavidC.Garcia@dshs.texas.gov
Tobacco Prevention & Control	Rick Meza	(210) 867-7634	Rick.Meza@dshs.texas.gov
Tuberculosis (TB) Control Program	Elvia Ledezma, MPH	(210) 949-2177	Elvia.Ledezma@dshs.texas.gov
Zoonosis Control	Amanda Kieffer, DVM, MPH	(210) 949-2048	Amanda.Kieffer@dshs.texas.gov

# DSHS SOUTH CENTRAL TEXAS OFFICE LOCATIONS

