



Syndromic Surveillance Governance Council

August 16, 2018

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

DSHS, 1100 W 49th St, M-101

Austin, TX 78756

Attendees (* Council Members):

- * Carol M. Davis, MSPH, CPH, Deputy Regional Director, Public Health Region (PHR) 7, DSHS
- * Linda K. Gaul, MPH, PhD, State Epidemiologist, DSHS
- * David W. Gruber, Associate Commissioner, Division for Regional and Local Health Operations (RLHO), DSHS
- * Talmage M. Holmes, PhD, MPH, Associate Director, Disease Control and Prevention, Tarrant County Public Health
- * Philip Huang, MD, MPH, Medical Director/Health Authority, Austin Public Health
- * Johnathan Ledbetter, MPH, Epidemiologist/Invasive and Respiratory Infectious Disease Team Lead, Emerging and Acute Infectious Disease Branch, DSHS
- * Belinda Medrano, MPH, Infection Prevention, Valley Baptist Medical Center-Brownsville
- * Thaddeus Miller, MPH, DrPH, Associate Professor, University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC), School of Public Health
- * Joann Schulte, DO, MPH, Chief Physician and Deputy Health Authority, Houston Health Department

Leo Achembong, Health IT Policy Project Manager, DSHS
Allison Banicki, Epidemiologist, Office of Border Public Health, DSHS
Carrie Bradford, PhD, Syndromic Surveillance Team Lead, RLHO, DSHS
Steve Eichner, HIT Policy Director, CER, DSHS
Paul Grunenwald, Communicable Disease Manager, Region 6/5S, DSHS
Siobhan Loughman, Epidemiologist, PHR 11, DSHS
Jyllisa Mabion, Syndromic Surveillance Epidemiologist, RLHO, DSHS
Kevin McClaran, Epidemiologist, Region 1, DSHS
Scott Mize, Tarrant County Public Health
Bonnie Morehead, Epidemiologist, PHR 7, DSHS
Kikelomo Oduba, Houston Health Department
Vanessa Palacios, Epidemiologist, Region 9/10, DSHS
Carlos Plasencia, MD, Regional Medical Director, Region 6/5, DSHS
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH, Regional Medical Director, Region 11, DSHS
Steven Pulvino, Epidemiologist, Region 2/3, DSHS
Jorge Reyes, Epidemiologist, Region 8, DSHS
Victor Rosas, Administrative Assistant IV, RLHO, DSHS
Biru Yang, Houston Health Department

Council Members Not Present:

- * Herminia Alva, MPH, CPH, Disaster Epidemiologist, Health Emergency Preparedness and Response, Department of State Health Services (DSHS)
- * Santos Navarrette, Jr., MA, MBA, Assistant Health Administrator, Abilene-Taylor County Public Health District
- * Carl Vartian, MD, MS, Chief Medical Information Officer, HCA-Gulf Coast Division
- * J. Don Vickers, MEd, CCHP, CMP, CNE, CEO/Managing Partner HPT Healthcare



1. Welcome and Introductions
 - Roll call of Council members and introductions of other attendees
2. Approval of April 26, 2018, Meeting Minutes
 - Meeting minutes were approved as written
3. Old Business
 - a. TxS2 Implementation and Registration

DSHS update:

- Have continued recruiting and onboarding
 - Currently 104 facilities in production that are directly submitting data to DSHS
 - Completed onboarding of Tarrant County to get PHR 2/3 data feed, added another 100 facilities
 - Brings TxS2 overall total to just over 200 facilities
- Have continued onboarding process with Houston to get PHR 6/5S data feed
- Have continued onboarding with the National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP)
- Provided first train-the-trainer session with regional staff on June 27 and regions are beginning to train their partners
- Completed ESSENCE enhancements/upgrade to version 1.21, as well as opened firewalls to allow weather data and air quality data to be incorporated

Tarrant County update:

- Have conducted two of three in-person training sessions
- 3rd session for Northern counties is upcoming
 - Will be geared toward hospital users (others were geared toward epi users)
 - Goal is to find out how hospital user needs differ from public health user needs and how to tailor education for them, especially if it relates to non-reportable or chronic conditions (e.g. behavioral health issues)
- Suggested that in future ESSENCE trainings it should be emphasized that users, along with data administrators, can take an “active role” in monitoring data quality and sudden data drops from their hospitals (e.g. hospitals making small changes to their medical records systems which can cause problems with data)
- Two approaches users can use to verify data:
 - stratify data by hospitals within their jurisdiction
 - stratify by syndrome
- One of most important features in ESSENCE 1.21 system is the “Also apply search string to” feature which allows the combination of syndromes and sub-syndromes with pretext query into a single query and have an “or” relationship between them



- Helpful resources that cover the new 1.21 features:
 - Latest ESSENCE webinar ([ESSENCE Q & A v2.0](https://www.surveillancerepository.org/essence-q-v20) - <https://www.surveillancerepository.org/essence-q-v20>) on the ISDS website
 - Slides provided in the DSHS Announcement
- Users should be wary of potential data glitches when using CC&DD categories, as they were designed with the CDC's NSSP system in mind and there may be minor differences in how data is displayed in ESSENCE, even though both systems use the same raw data.

Houston update:

- Had elections with regional group and elected new officers:
 - Dr. Schulte is the new Chair
 - Harris County got a representative for vice chair
 - Biru was elected Secretary
 - NSSP will provide external validation on messages soon
 - Have focused more on training internal and external stakeholders:
 - Conducted 4 training sessions for Houston Health Department employees in May
 - Also provided training in EPI/BT (bioterrorism) meeting in June
 - Total of 114 individuals (68 internal, 36 external) stakeholders benefited from training
- b. Former TALHO system
- Of all 73 we had, there are only two that are still pending engagement (in Regions 2/3 and 6/5)
 - Domain name expires December 4th, as a result the system will no longer be accessible
- c. Meaningful Use
- There have been a few changes at the federal level:
 - Earlier this year, a new rule that proposed making syndromic surveillance reporting required for hospitals participating in incentive payment programs for meaningful use. Ultimately, it was decided that these hospitals will only be required to participate in public health reporting/public health data exchange for two measures of their own choosing (including ELR, Immunizations, Syndromic Surveillance, and a few others)
 - New rule for ambulatory service providers has been proposed and is out for comments. It would allow states to extend syndromic surveillance to non-urgent/non-emergency care providers who are participating in promoting interoperability on the Medicaid and Medicare sides. This is not required and we can be specific in who we invite to submit data (for example, rural areas with no hospitals). Would be good method of recruiting new syndromic surveillance participants and they would have the option to receive credit if they were participating in Medicaid's Quality Payment Program. Comments due to Steve Eichner by September 10.



4. New Business

a. Presentation to Legislative Budget Board (LBB)

- As a precursor to the upcoming Legislative Session (January 2019) the LBB comes up with a budget for the state and for state agencies.
- In development of that budget, the LBB has spoken to some DSHS programs and they are interested in the Syndromic Surveillance Program
- With all the work everyone has done, the Syndromic Surveillance Program has been moved into a positive spotlight and there will more than likely be more inquiries as to how it can be used (especially how it can be used with opioid-related issues)
- Think of ways that the system can be used and how the information can be shared amongst all users
- All should have these ideas or success stories “at the ready” in case we receive any inquiries during the Legislative Session

b. Query and Data Analysis Sharing and Standardization

- Air quality data and weather data are now incorporated into ESSENCE and can be overlaid with queries of interest. Handout shows examples of this for PM_{2.5} and asthma-like events as well as maximum temperature and heat-related illness.
- Queries for routine, seasonal, substance abuse, and other public health event surveillance were sent out for review and comment and queries were revised based on feedback. These queries have now been shared with TxS2 users for incorporation in their surveillance efforts.
- Plan to start a User Discussion Group that would meet by webinar quarterly (about a month prior to SSGC meetings). Regions and local health departments would be able to present current projects and/or suggest new queries for development. Summary of group discussion would be presented at the following SSGC meeting. Most likely to commence next calendar year, once more hospitals have already been onboarded and more people are trained.

c. Regional Advisory Committees

- Region 1:
 - Have been training Amarillo health department in ESSENCE
 - Held a training with Lubbock Health Department
 - Working to rebuild advisory committee
 - Monitoring syndromic surveillance system daily
- Region 2/3:
 - Held a couple of SSRAC sessions this year, most of it has been familiarizing those in the group with syndromic surveillance and ESSENCE
 - Introducing queries and using the system in general
- Region 4/5:
 - *Not present*



- Region 6/5:
 - Ongoing work on ESSENCE implementation
 - Continue to work with Houston Health Department
 - Ongoing onboarding efforts
- Region 7:
 - Working to rebuild advisory committee
 - Region 7 epidemiologists attended train-the-trainer event in June and has started to train some local health department staff during two-hour training sessions
 - Anticipating upcoming additions of large hospital systems going into production and the increase of available data this will provide
- Region 8:
 - Working on developing training plan
 - Plan to hold advisory council meeting at the end of September to train regional staff and regional advisory council members on the use of ESSENCE
- Region 9/10:
 - Working on training regional epi staff and plan to roll out user hands-on training for regional users
 - Restructuring advisory committee membership group
- Region 11:
 - Next regional advisory council meeting has been scheduled for August 29
 - Have been using the system for arboviral surveillance after June flooding
 - Currently looking at two different types of queries to see if there is any increase of arboviral disease in the community
 - Held training for epi staff on ESSENCE query tool, specifically using the arboviral surveillance query to review data

d. Topics for Discussion at October SSGC Meeting

- October meeting will be held by conference call
- Query and Data Analysis Sharing and Standardization update
- Requests for additional discussion topics by email

5. Open Discussion

- Dr. Joanne Schulte:
 - Added 1 new member to regional group: The Associate Dean of the UT School of Bioinformatics
 - Currently working on Jurisdictional Etiquette Committee to begin figuring out questions such as: “If something does appear to spike in the system, who investigates it? How are people made aware?” Have had 2 meetings so far and will follow up with progress at a later SSGC meeting.



- Belinda Medrano:
 - Question about ESSENCE Access handout that shows different hospitals submitting data and who is monitoring it. It says ESSENCE access for Local Health Departments. Does that mean the region is also monitoring?
 - Carrie Bradford's Response: When the region is acting as a local health department for that county. Light blue is where there is an actual health department that has access to review data, dark blue is that our regional office is acting as LHD for that particular county and looking at their data.

6. 2018 Meeting Dates and Times

- October 18, 2018, 1:00 PM (conference call)

7. 2019 Proposed Meeting Dates and Time

- January 24, 2019, 1:00 (in person at DSHS)
 - Dave Gruber would like to have a Syndromic Surveillance poster session hosted by RLHO
 - Will provide opportunity for the regions and partner counties to present what they have been working on
 - As a result, a different January meeting date will be selected in order to secure meeting space for what will be the annual SSGC in-person meeting combined with poster session to display work
- April 18, 2019, 1:00 PM (conference call)
- July 11, 2019, 1:00 PM (conference call)
- October 24, 2019, 1:00 PM (conference call)

8. Closing