Immunizations

Immunizations are widely recognized as one of the top ten public health successes of the 20th century, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Diseases like measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, and polio were once widespread. Today, vaccine-preventable diseases are relatively rare in the United States due to coordinated efforts to vaccinate the public. Yet every year, Texans die from vaccine-preventable diseases or suffer from their complications.

In 2013, Texas experienced the highest number of pertussis (whooping cough) cases since 1959, with over 3,900 cases. Recently, the media has also reported on a measles outbreak spreading across many states that started with one family vacationing at a California amusement park.

These outbreaks highlight the importance of continuing immunization/vaccination efforts. It is important for Texans to receive all recommended immunizations on time. A highly vaccinated population reduces the number of vaccine-preventable disease cases and safeguards the health of all Texans.

The mission of the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Immunization Branch is to increase vaccination coverage levels for infants, children, adolescents, and adults, and to reduce and control the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases. The Immunization Branch operates the Texas Vaccines for Children and Adult Safety Net Programs; operates and promotes the statewide immunization registry, ImmTrac; establishes minimum state vaccine requirements for child-care facilities and kindergarten through 12th grades; and conducts vaccine-preventable disease surveillance and outbreak response efforts. Additionally, the Immunization Branch works with immunization partners and stakeholders through the Texas Immunization Stakeholder Working Group to promote immunizations, collaborate on immunization-related projects and events, and solicit input and feedback on increasing vaccination coverage rates.

To implement strategies to increase vaccination coverage rates, ensure full immunization capacity across Texas and respond to vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks, the Immunization Branch provides funding to DSHS Health Service Regions (HSRs) and local health departments to operate immunization programs at the local level. Activities include:

• Promoting, enrolling, and monitoring Texas Vaccines for Children providers, Adult Safety Net Program providers, and registered ImmTrac users;
• Conducting educational and outreach activities, including promoting national immunization observances; and
• Providing immunization services to eligible clients through the Texas Vaccines for Children and Adult Safety Net Programs.

For more information, see www.immunizetexas.com.

Our faith traditions call us to serve our communities...to care for the least of our brothers and sisters...to love our neighbors. But the needs can seem overwhelming and it can be hard to get started. Better Neighbors is a monthly toolkit to help you and your congregation make a difference in your local community. Each month we focus on one area of need, giving you practical steps to take action and learn more. Better Neighbors is a project of Texas Impact, Texas' oldest and largest statewide interfaith network.
Understanding Texas Government

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS)

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is responsible for a wide array of programs designed to address the public health needs of the state. DSHS consists of a central entity located in Austin and eight health service regions across Texas. DSHS provides public health services directly and through many partner organizations (local health departments, other state agencies, community and faith-based organizations, the private healthcare system, academia, and more).

State law allows local governments to establish local health departments and health districts. These departments and districts are independent from DSHS and provide a wide variety of services. DSHS frequently contracts with local health departments to provide public health services at the local level.

Texas local public health organizations vary in size, and the range of services provided is based on availability and type of funding, expertise, and need as determined by the community they serve. Many of Texas’ 254 counties do not have a local health department. In those areas, the DSHS Health Service Regions (HSRs) perform public health functions.

To learn more, visit: [http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

CDC works to protect America from health, safety and security threats, both foreign and in the U.S. Whether diseases start at home or abroad, are chronic or acute, curable or preventable, human error or deliberate attack, CDC fights disease and supports communities and citizens to do the same.

CDC increases the health security of our nation. As the nation’s health protection agency, CDC saves lives and protects people from health threats. To accomplish their mission, CDC conducts critical science and provides health information that protects our nation against expensive and dangerous health threats, and responds when these arise.

CDC’s online resources offer guidance on many components on disease control and prevention, including vaccinations.

To learn more, visit: [http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/).
COMMUNITY PARTNER PROGRAM

More than one million individuals in Texas qualify for life-saving food or health benefits but are not enrolled to receive them. Is your congregation interested in how to better be in community with low-income families in your neighborhood or city?

If so, the Community Partner Program is a great opportunity for you!

Texans can now apply online for public benefit programs like CHIP, TANF, SNAP and Medicaid through the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC) new online portal. Recognizing that many low-income families do not have Internet access or might need additional help, the Community Partner Program is a state initiative that allows local congregations to assist low-income Texans in applying for needed benefits.

Through HHSC’s Community Partner Recruitment Initiative, Texas Impact is working with HHSC, the Texas Hunger Initiative and the Texas Association of Community Health Centers to recruit communities of faith and other local nonprofit organizations to provide internet access and/or trained volunteers to help low-income families apply for state benefit programs.

Texas Impact has a team of AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers in offices throughout Texas who would love the opportunity to come speak about the program with your faith group or lead a presentation or event for the local community at your organization.

For more information, contact Andrea Earl at andrea@texasimpact.org or Scott Atnip at scott@texasimpact.org.

LEARN MORE

**Vaccines are safe.** To learn more about immunizations visit:

- http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/default.htm

For more information about the Adult Safety Net Program, please visit:

- http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/asn/

For information about the Texas Vaccines for Children Program, please visit:

- http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/tvfc/default.shtm

For information sheets produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that explain both the benefits and risks of a vaccine, review the Vaccine Information Statements (VISs):

- https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/literature/litlist.shtm#vis

DO MORE

Do your part to prevent the spread of preventable diseases by getting yourself and your loved ones vaccinated.

- For the immunization schedule for adults, please visit: http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/Schedule/schedule_adult.shtm.
- For the immunization schedule for children and adolescents, please visit: http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/Schedule/schedule_child.shtm.

Organize your immunizations with ImmTrac, the Texas Immunization Registry, a no-cost service offered by the Texas Department of State Health Services: http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/immtrac/default.shtm.

Learn about immunizations with your community. Host a Sunday School or other event to untangle the misunderstandings around this important subject. Consider the following resources to guide your discussion.

- Brochures and informational literature: http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/flyers-brochures.htm

Want to Dig Deeper?
Texas Impact was established by Texas religious leaders in 1973 to be a voice in the Texas legislative process for the shared religious social concerns of Texas’ faith communities. Texas Impact is supported by more than two-dozen Christian, Jewish and Muslim denominational bodies, as well as hundreds of local congregations, ministerial alliances and interfaith networks, and thousands of people of faith throughout Texas. Texas Impact and our sister organization, the Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy, provide theologically-grounded public policy educational resources on our member organizations’ shared social concerns and opportunities for advocacy for people of faith.

TEXAS IMPACT MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): Southwest Region, Bluebonnet Area, Central Area, Coastal Plains Area, North Texas Area, Trinity-Brazos Area • Episcopal Church: Diocese of West Texas • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): Northern TX-Northern LA Synod, TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod, Southwestern Texas Synod • Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Grace Presbytery, Mission Presbytery, New Covenant Presbytery, Palo Duro Presbytery, Tres Rios Presbytery • United Methodist Church: Central Texas Conference, North Texas Conference, Northwest Texas Conference, Rio Texas Conference, Texas Conference • Methodist Federation for Social Action: Rio Texas Chapter, Central Texas Chapter • Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission • Union Baptist Fellowship • United Church of Christ: South Central Conference • Society of Friends: South Central Yearly Meeting • Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry • North Texas Islamic Council • Islamic Circle of North America • Interfaith Action of Central Texas (iACT) • San Antonio Community of Congregations • Tarrant Area Community of Churches • Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston • United Methodist Women • Church Women United in Texas • Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas • National Council of Jewish Women • Dominican Sisters of Houston

TEXAS IMPACT
President–Reverend Dr. Whitney Bodman | Vice President–Richard Ertel | Secretary–Amanda Quraishi | Treasurer–Reverend Jim McClain | Executive Director–Bee Moorhead

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