



Tarrant County Public Health



2009 Annual Report

***Safeguarding
Our Community's
Health***



Mission

Safeguarding Our
Community's Health

Vision

Healthy People and
Healthy Communities

Tarrant County Public Health will be recognized as the public health expert within the communities it serves. Working in collaboration with partners in governmental and non-governmental organizations, we will be prepared for health threats such as chronic disease, health disparities and public health emergencies. We will achieve operational excellence through best business practices, data-driven decisions, customer orientation, a skilled, motivated workforce and sustainable funding.

On the cover:

People enter the W. G. Thomas Coliseum in Haltom City on October 31, 2009. This was Tarrant County Public Health's first event offering free H1N1 vaccinations.



Director's Message

As I was getting ready for work the other day, one of the national morning news shows was interviewing a 5-year-old boy about something non-health related. He started coughing and quickly covered his cough with the crook of his arm. I was elated!

That is public health at its most successful. That one act embodies the core mission and vision of public health: to safeguard the community's health and healthy people in healthy communities.

That simple act of prevention along with several others probably prevented the H1N1 pandemic from becoming more widespread than it has been so far.

Pandemic! Yes, it happened. The long predicted event for which we had been planning and training really happened.

Pandemic! Yes, it happened. The long predicted event for which we had been planning and training really happened. But, of course, it did not start in some remote far off place, it started in our own backyard and we were quick to move into action.

Our lab, epidemiology, public information, preparedness, vaccine distribution and senior leadership staff worked tirelessly night and day for a solid month and then day in and day out through the summer and fall into early winter keeping up with the latest knowledge and strategies regarding H1N1. During that entire time, the rest of the staff maintained our regular services. We are glad that the virus has not been a more virulent one but we remain vigilant with our ongoing sentinel lab testing and our epidemiological surveillance as well as vaccination services. We appreciate the community support throughout this effort.

As you read through this annual report, you will see that we were indeed busy with other activities despite the pandemic. Our fight to prevent chronic diseases, communicable diseases, infant mortality and health disparities continues. We have met new partners this year and competed fiercely for scant funding to expand necessary services. We will continue to do so during the coming year as well. We rely on our community partners to assist in addressing all of the issues deemed public health issues. It is fortunate that we work well together.

Yours in health,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lou Brewer".

Lou Brewer

School shot rush reflects changes in requirements

Anyone who has gone to school or enrolled a child in school knows that immunizations are one of the measures taken to help stop the spread of disease. In 2009, Texas immunization requirements were updated to bring Texas elementary and secondary school requirements more in line with the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

As a result of the new vaccination requirements, Tarrant County Public Health's Immunization Program benefitted more than 13,000 children in August 2009.

After school began, some local school districts excluded large numbers of children from school for inadequate immunizations.

To help meet the increased demand for immunizations and reduce the time away from school, TCPH held numerous shot clinics in schools as well as public health centers and special events throughout the county.

The changes in immunization requirements will continue to occur, and to meet the demand and help ensure that the immunizations are provided, Public Health will maximize its resources to reduce the time that any child has to spend away from school.



New Vaccination requirements

Hepatitis A Vaccine:

All students entering kindergarten, are required to have 2 doses of Hepatitis A vaccine.

Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) Vaccine:

All students entering kindergarten are required to have two doses of MMR vaccine.

Varicella Vaccine:

All students entering kindergarten and 7th grade are required to have 2 doses of varicella vaccine or documentation that they had the disease.

Tetanus, Diphtheria and acellular pertussis-containing Vaccine (Tdap):

All students entering the 7th grade are required to have one dose of Tdap vaccine.

Meningococcal Vaccine:

All students entering 7th grade are required to have one dose of meningococcal vaccine.

H1N1 Takes Hold

In March and April 2009, a novel H1N1 influenza virus began causing illness in Mexico and parts of the United States. The first H1N1 case in Tarrant County was confirmed on April 25. By June, the virus created a pandemic as it spread across the globe.

Guided by its Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Plan, TCPH used surveillance, planning and an integrated public health team to coordinate the Tarrant County response to the pandemic. The epidemiology, laboratory, public health preparedness and administrative staff members swung into high gear tracking possible cases, gathering and testing specimens and providing school districts, county leadership and the public with important data and health recommendations on an almost daily basis.



When the H1N1 vaccine became available, a series of community events were coordinated to first meet the needs of the CDC-designated target groups and then others in the community.

The free vaccine was provided through TCPH's seven public health centers and through six community storefront locations. The storefront locations were set up to increase access and availability, and they were open longer than the public health centers and included Saturday hours. Eventually, a total of 13 community locations and 40 school clinics were set up by TCPH to offer the H1N1 vaccine. More than 85,000 free vaccinations were given.

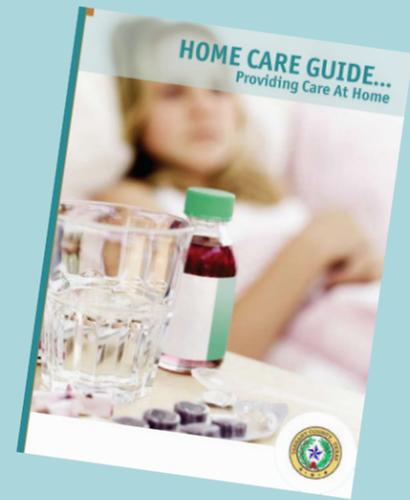
A communications campaign ran parallel with most of the other actions and activities. Beginning with timely media messages, it included a toolkit on the TCPH Web site that could be downloaded by residents and community partners, billboards, theater advertising and online newspaper advertising.

In addition to H1N1-specific and preparedness information on the Public Health Web site, TCPH would later launch a Facebook page to cover H1N1-related issues.

H1N1 remains the predominant influenza in circulation. Because influenza is unpredictable, flu activity may continue to decrease or it may increase. Tarrant County Public Health along with its local, regional and national partners continue to watch the situation.



Right and opposite: Tarrant County citizens line up to receive their H1N1 vaccinations.



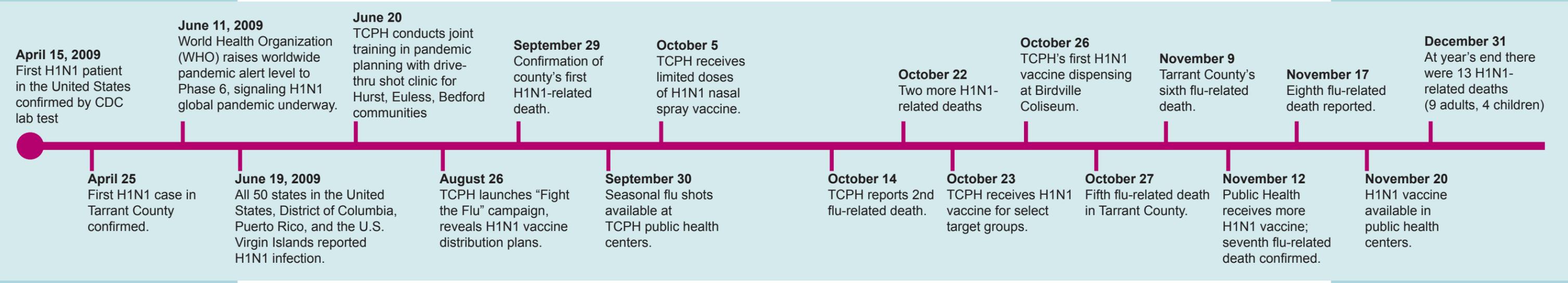
Caring for the sick during emergencies

Earlier in 2009, Public Health Preparedness partnered with the Southwest Center for Advanced Public Health Practice to print The Home Care Guide. The guide provides information about caring for sick persons at home during a pandemic.

It was designed to meet the needs of medical providers for patient education and hopefully keep emergency rooms and doctor's offices from being overwhelmed during a pandemic. The guide is also available in Spanish.

Thirteen community locations and 40 school clinics were set up by the Tarrant County Public Health Department to offer the H1N1 vaccine.

More than 85,000 free vaccinations were administered.





The nurse home visitors completed training in February with the full compliment of eight nurses required to implement the nationally recognized home-visitation program. The training was provided at the national office of the Nurse Family Partnership in Denver.

The required training is key to this evidence-based program that helps transform the lives of vulnerable mothers pregnant with their first child. Each mother is partnered with a highly trained registered nurse early in her pregnancy and receives ongoing nurse home visits until her child's second birthday.

The nurse home visitors have encountered clients with issues including homelessness, domestic violence, school drop outs, mental health issues, drug addiction, diabetes, stroke and hunger.

The nurses are involved with several community agencies throughout Tarrant County to help assure they are current on possible referral resources for the mothers they serve. Another invaluable resource for the nurses and the families they serve is the Community Advisory Board comprised of members from local universities, local government, religious institutions, and other community-based agencies.

The program has greatly impacted first-time families in Tarrant County in its first year.

Working on preparedness

Since 9-11, emergency preparedness has been a highlighted function entrusted to public health. TCPH's Public Health Preparedness has worked with numerous businesses, communities and governmental groups to help them in their emergency preparations. Its staff, volunteers and other public health staff and community partners regularly test and evaluate mass prophylaxis plans.

Starting in January 2009, TCPH held a joint exercise with The Salvation Army to practice mass dispensing of medications while providing free flu shots to shelter participants.

In June, TCPH teamed with the cities of Hurst, Euless, Bedford and the HEB school district to offer free hepatitis A shots to local food handlers, first responders, daycare workers, school personnel and others who work in health care. The clinic also was an opportunity to test the planning and coordination of volunteers and resources in providing shots and medications to residents in these communities.

Later in the year, TCPH's Public Health Preparedness and Immunization Outreach groups teamed up with the Birdville ISD and Haltom City to provide drive-thru flu shots. The event was an exercise to test plans for efficient delivery of mass vaccinations. More than 340 seasonal flu shots were given at this event.



Clues to understanding disease

Epidemiology, as the core science of public health, is integral to understanding the factors that contribute to disease conditions, and uses data to implement changes that lead to a reduction in disease.

In 2009, the division of Epidemiology and Health Information investigated more than 4,000 infectious disease conditions in Tarrant County. The introduction of the novel H1N1 influenza virus in April resulted in the investigation of more than 250 cases, enhancing public health response by identifying risk factors associated with increased morbidity and mortality.

Nosocomial or hospital-acquired infections continued to cause significant morbidity and mortality in 2009, resulting in the identification and investigation of two unusual disease clusters in Tarrant County hospitals; these clusters were caused by bacterial species ubiquitous in the environment, which may cause disease in certain susceptible populations.

In 2009, the 3rd Tarrant County BRFSS surveyed 3,500 respondents to assess health behaviors, access to health care and preventative health practices throughout Tarrant County.

In regards to chronic disease conditions, the division is the only entity in the North Texas region to conduct the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) locally on a regularly scheduled basis.

Whooping Cough Re-emerges

A significant increase in pertussis, also known as “whooping cough,” was detected via Tarrant County’s ongoing surveillance system. Surveillance identified a 312 percent increase in cases from 2007 to 2008, resulting in a “whooping cough” awareness campaign in 2009 targeted towards local health care providers.

Morbidity in Tarrant County

DISEASES		2007	2008	2009	
Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)		81	150	52	
HIV Seropositive		192	216	242	
E. coli O157:H7 Infection		2	10	9	
Hepatitis (1):	Type A	26	20	34	
	Type B	923	839	684	
	Type C	2,365	3,080	2,545	
Meningitis:	Aseptic	259	190	213	
	Invasive Meningococcal**	2	10	7	
	Other Bacterial	4	5	7	
Pertussis		68	286	185	
Salmonellosis (2)		197	318	202	
Shigellosis		48	62	39	
STD:	Chlamydia	5,583	8,506	7,828	
	Gonorrhea	2,567	3,090	2,900	
	Syphilis:	Congenital (<1 yr.)	7	6	16
		Primary	25	24	48
		Secondary	57	80	134
Other	180	106	124		
Tuberculosis		61	89	109	
West Nile virus (3)		25	16	29	

Information provided is for selected reportable diseases. Serious health threats and suspected bioterrorism agents also are reportable and include anthrax, smallpox, plague, tularemia, botulism, brucellosis, Q fever and viral hemorrhagic fever.

* H1N1 influenza was unknown in Tarrant County before 2009

** Invasive meningococcal disease: cases include blood infections as well as meningitis cases



An effective “No Crypto” campaign

During the summer of 2008, an outbreak of Cryptosporidiosis, a diarrheal disease, sickened thousands of North Texans and caused several local public swimming facilities to temporarily close. As a preemptive move to counter a repeat of the outbreak, Tarrant County Public Health teamed up with health agencies from Collin, Dallas and Denton counties in 2009 to launch a summertime “No Crypto” campaign.

The campaign, targeted to the general public, focused on delivering Crypto precaution and prevention messages. The partnership’s region-wide approach also included increased surveillance, prevention and control measures. How effective was the campaign? There were no reported Crypto cases for 2009.

Lab plays critical role with testing, surveillance

The North Texas Regional Laboratory (NTRL) participated in the public health response to pandemic influenza by providing testing for seasonal influenza types A and B and testing for the novel 2009 H1N1 influenza A strain.

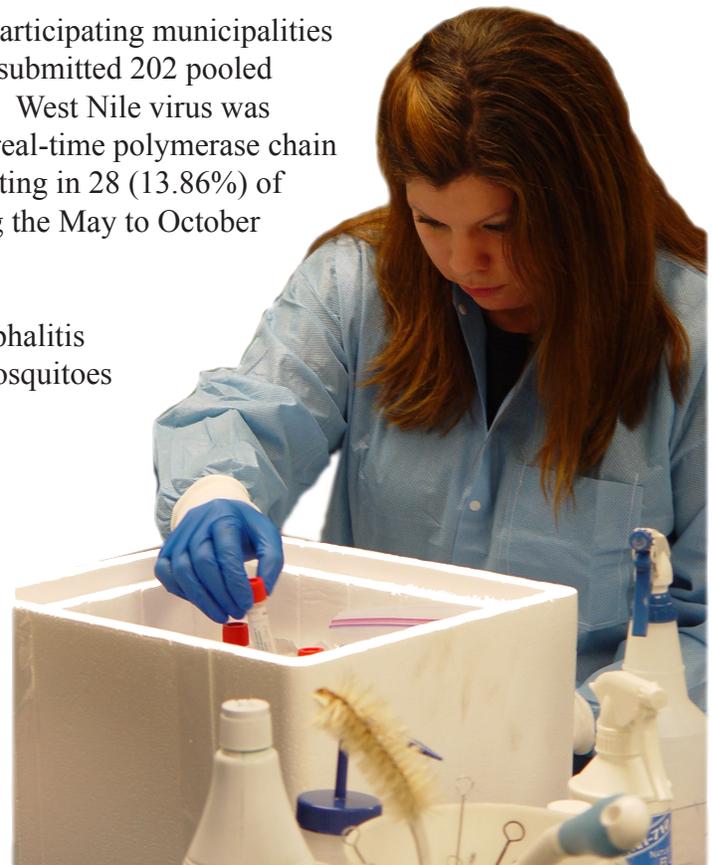
During a typical influenza season, the NTRL tests approximately 300 specimens for respiratory viruses, including seasonal influenza. In the first four weeks of the pandemic influenza response, the NTRL tested 907 respiratory specimens for influenza and this surge in specimens was a 36-fold increase over the typical monthly test volume.

This surge in the volume of specimens tested greatly stretched the NTRL’s capacity in 2009. The lessons learned from the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic surge event helped the NTRL formulate strategies to enhance lab capacity during this and future pandemic influenza outbreaks.

In 2009, the NTRL also completed the seventh year of surveillance for arboviruses such as West Nile virus and St. Louis encephalitis virus.

Also in 2009, 22 participating municipalities in Tarrant County submitted 202 pooled mosquito samples. West Nile virus was detected by rapid real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing in 28 (13.86%) of the samples during the May to October mosquito season.

No St. Louis encephalitis was detected in mosquitoes during 2009.



Fighting obesity in a colorful way

In the fight against obesity, Public Health has combined innovative partnerships and real-life activities to promote healthy behaviors through its obesity prevention campaign, Live A More Colorful Life (LAMCL). The department's LAMCL campaign had a fruitful first year in 2009. The campaign, funded through the Texas Department of State Health Services, promotes the benefits of incorporating fruits and vegetables into daily diets as a step toward reducing and preventing obesity in Tarrant County.

The campaign was instrumental in establishing a farmers market in Richland Hills and marketing of the farmers market in Pantego. Both markets ran two days a week from June through September. As a result, the North Central Texas Farmers Market Association was able to further develop its partnership with Tarrant County Public Health.

One measure of success is the increased redemption of WIC vouchers in exchange for produce. More than \$56,000 in vouchers were redeemed for fresh fruits and vegetables during the spring and summer of 2009, compared to \$36,000 in vouchers the previous year.

In an effort to increase childhood awareness of the benefits of growing produce, Public Health partnered with United Healthcare to establish a community garden at the Southeast YMCA in Fort Worth. The families who use the YMCA are continuing to nurture the garden and cultivate fresh herbs and vegetables.



Live a more colorful life

The Live a More Colorful Life campaign Web site includes selection, storage and nutrition information about locally grown produce.

The Web site, which is updated monthly, has more than 60 recipes that use produce that is seasonally available to Tarrant County residents. The Live a More Colorful Life campaign helps residents incorporate more seasonal fruits and vegetables into their diets.



Carnaval targets Hispanic health issues

Carnaval gives back to the community

Carnaval would not be the success it is without the support of the numerous vendors, sponsors, and volunteers. More than 80 volunteers contributed approximately 750 hours to produce the Carnaval, allowing 100 percent of funds raised to be used for direct services.

Carnaval de Salud, Tarrant County Public Health's annual Binational Health Week event, has grown immensely since it first began in 2006. In 2009, more than 2,200 persons received direct health services and education at the Carnaval. This represented a growth of approximately 300 percent over 2008 attendance. Carnaval also had increased participation from health department divisions and community agencies providing education, services and demonstrations (14 in 2006, 38 in 2009). As a result of these increases, Carnaval used all available clinic spaces and education rooms at TCPH and erected tents in the parking area to accommodate the attendees.



The 2009 Carnaval also took place at the height of media awareness regarding the flu season. More than 500 seasonal flu vaccines were provided free of charge during the event.

Other services included: glucose/cholesterol screens, HIV/STD tests, body mass indexing, kid safety identification registrations, vision screens, "Visit the Doctor" sessions, and dental exams. Live demonstrations included healthy gardening and cooking, car seat safety, preventing family violence and a special educational session on alcohol, drug and tobacco addiction from Dr. Rosa Aurora Jiménez, Associate Director, Health Promotion and Education, State of Zacatecas, Mexico.



Program measures

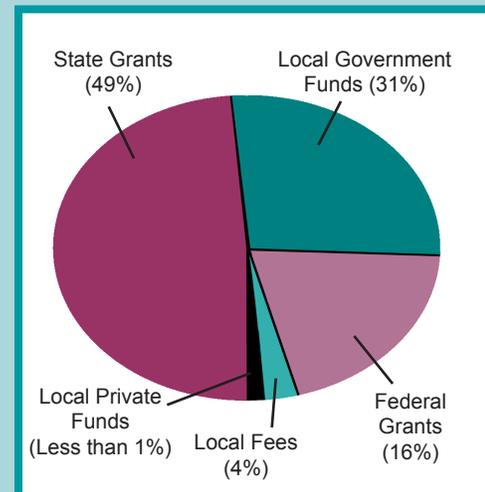
This table provides a snapshot of three years of program activity. Fluctuations in the numbers may be attributed to a range of reporting changes.

	2007	2008	2009
BCCCP ¹ - clients screened	1,084	1,271	996
BCCCP - case-managed clients	377	547	293
Pregnancy tests & referrals	1,210	1,326	1,222
Flu shot provided	9,560	9,553	12,872
Immunizations provided	144,959	127,905	136,799
WIC ² - visits	633,071	670,329	710,597
Chronic disease screenings	1,511	1,389	1,300
Health education - health events, presentations	775	840	682
Health education - referrals	1,948	377	537
Communicable disease reports investigated	5,108	6,053	5,091
New HIV cases reported	143	207	242
STD clinic visits	7,348	8,348	7,002
STD disease intervention field investigations	3,186	3,084	3,534
STD/HIV field screening of high-risk individuals	5,020	5,295	7,191
Individuals from target populations receiving HIV education and/or testing and counseling	1,556	2,409	2,354
HIV pre- and post-test counseling sessions	6,449	4,254	3,272
Clients provided HIV/STD prevention education	6,449	6,549	7,100
Clinical lab tests performed	47,698	53,185	54,410
HIV-1 lab tests performed	11,096	12,840	9,338
Clients tested for HIV	6,471	7,158	5,635
HIV/STD cases investigated, partners notified	951	768	950
Preventive Medicine Clinic (PMC) HIV care caseload	658	723	866
PMC clinic visits	5,298	6,250	5,819
Travel Health Services clinic visits	4,437	4,412	4,457
TB clinic visits	30,571	15,642	15,700
TB contacts screened as part of disease intervention investigation	1,375	1,010	500
TB cases in Tarrant County	106	89	110
Percent of foreign-born TB cases	55	62	45
Suspected TB cases treated preventively	334	306	310
HIV co-infections (cases only)	6	8	10
Drug resistant cases (TB)	4	5	5
Directly Observed Therapy doses administered in the field (TB)	14,093	13,113	14,849
DOPT ³ doses administered (TB)	8,431	5,955	3,685
Contacts investigated (TB)	2,292	428	735
Total on therapy (TB)	455	395	408
Total with latent TB infection	1,030	1,158	1,164
Food establishment inspections	5,488	4,706	5,713
Swimming pool inspections	779	684	971
Onsite sewage facilities permitted	486	379	225
Food handlers trained/certified	18,232	17,707	14,664
High-blood-lead-level environmental inspections	7	11	10
Mosquito pools tested for WNV	338	210	202
Milk and dairy lab tests performed	25,834	23,218	21,068
Water lab tests performed	22,090	22,184	21,732

1 Breast & Cervical Cancer Control Program
 2 Women, Infants and Children Program
 3 Directly Observed Preventive Therapy

Financial Status

Local government funds	11,631,993
Local fees	1,433,950
Local private funds	161,297
State grants	18,126,765
Federal grants	5,924,955
TOTAL	\$37,278,960



Total WIC grocery dollars that entered Tarrant County's economy in 2009:

\$35,575,405



On October 1, 2009, the Tarrant County Women, Infants, Children (WIC) program saw the first major change to the foods provided by the program in 30 years. These changes aligned the food package with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and recommendations for infant feeding by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

This new updated food package includes fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains, offering participants a wider array of nutrients, phyto-chemicals and antioxidants, and other compounds that may have beneficial long-term effects on health. The revisions also provide additional benefits and incentives for the breast feeding mothers and babies, further supporting the long-term health of WIC participants.

In addition to new foods, there have been several changes to current foods on the program starting with milk. Only fat-free, 1% or 2% milk will be provided for women and children older than 2 years of age. Throughout the summer, partners with the WIC program, including health care providers, hospitals, grocery stores, and child care providers, received information about the new foods and how the changes would affect the women and children of Tarrant County. To date, the changes have been well received by all.

Division/Program news

Adult Health Services

The major focus of Adult Health Services in 2009 was to address the increase in early infectious syphilis experienced in the county. There were 101 cases of infectious syphilis reported in 2008 and 181 for 2009 – a 79 percent increase in cases reported in 2009. This would eventually necessitate a joint operational taskforce involving the Dallas and Tarrant County Public Health departments to reduce the incidence of disease levels in both counties. The last quarter of 2009 was spent in joint meetings with Dallas and the Texas Department of State Health Services to develop an implementation strategy for the operation. This disease trend reflects the national trend of increasing sexually transmitted diseases being identified and reported.

FitFuture KidsFest

In 2009, TCPH's Chronic Disease Prevention became the lead partner of the FitFuture KidsFest program, an annual event TCPH co-sponsored with several other community partners. The free event, held in Euless, Arlington and Fort Worth, respectively, invited parents and children to take part in a variety of fitness-related activities and provided information to help families stay healthy.



Infant deaths

The infant mortality rate in Tarrant County has been increasing since 2000. Currently at 7.6 deaths per 1,000 live births (2006), it is higher than state and national rates, and much higher than the national Healthy People 2010 goal of 4.5 per 1,000. Tarrant County's Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) program uses the National Fetal and Infant Mortality Review model. The model consists of two community based groups: the Case Review Team (CRT) and the Community Action Team. Each group is comprised of multidisciplinary members from across the county.

The CRT includes professionals and representatives from agencies that provide services or community resources for Tarrant County families. Each month, the team examines "de-identified" findings from record reviews and interviews with families affected by infant mortality. FIMR's goal is to bring community members together to examine social, economic, cultural, safety and health systems factors associated with fetal and infant mortality.

Based on the 24 infant deaths reviewed by the FIMR case review team in 2008, sexually transmitted diseases were identified as an intervention focus area for the community action team. (Findings of the Fetal Infant Mortality Review Tarrant County, 2009)

Binational Health Week Cultural Symposium

In collaboration with the Mexican Consulate and community partners in the DFW area, Tarrant County Public Health coordinated and presented 2009's Binational Health Week Cultural Symposium with the theme "From Disparity to Equity in the Hispanic Population." The Symposium took place on October 26 at the University of Texas at Arlington with the goal of enhancing the knowledge and skills of nurses, health care professionals, health students, and other practitioners regarding the health determinants related to disparity in health care. The symposium engaged the professional healthcare providers to embrace equity in the Hispanic population by equipping the participants with 21st century solutions. More than 200 persons attended 2009 Symposium.

County wins environmental award

Thanks in part to efforts made by staff from Environmental Health, Tarrant County was awarded the Highest Reduction of Vehicle Miles Traveled award in 2009 by the Best Workplaces for Commuters program. This program was developed to recognize companies that meet the National Standards of Excellence in commuter benefits. Tarrant County has been recognized as a Best Workplace for Commuters since 2004. In 2009, Haltom City was added to the list of cities Tarrant County Public Health contracts with to perform Swimming Pool Inspection services. The Environmental Health division also participated in a 2009 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study analyzing methods and problems related to swimming pools.

Russian doctors visit

Tarrant County Public Health hosted a group of visiting Russian doctors in May 2009. The delegation of six Russian health care leaders were visiting North Texas to observe and examine the U.S. health care system as part of the U.S. Congress-sponsored Open World Program to enhance understanding and capabilities for cooperation between the United States and Russia.



The African American Health Expo (AAHE) is an annual event dedicated to improving the well-being of African Americans in Tarrant County. AAHE's objective is to decrease the health disparities burdening this population by providing a venue where strategies for healthy living can be promoted and easily accessed. The event, which has grown each year since it started in 2002, directly impacts the lives of more than 2,000 participants by providing screenings and education on the prevention and treatment of diseases prevalent in the African American community.

TCPH has always participated in the planning of the AAHE and has provided necessary services and health education during the actual event. In 2009, TCPH assisted in facilitating the evaluation survey and transformed the data obtained into a survey report booklet that provides pictures, graphs and maps. The effort clearly illustrates that the expo is providing needed services. The goal next year is to assist with providing a system that reviews the follow-up and referral evaluation process that continues after the event.

Traveling healthy

Since 1996, Travel Health Services has been preparing people for international travel. Each THS location provides immunizations and up-to-date information about health and safety issues that may be encountered while traveling. Personal consultations are scheduled with a health professional who uses the latest travel health information; a customized itinerary is discussed for each traveler's destination; and recommended or required immunizations are administered and documented on an International Certificate of Vaccination to be kept with the traveler's passport.

Families traveling with children, business travelers and leisure travelers use the services as do students and health professionals. For people traveling with a group, Travel Health Services may be able to visit their site to provide the needed immunizations and information at a discounted price. Since the tragic events in Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake, Travel Health Services has prepared relief workers traveling to Haiti. TCPH regularly immunizes relief workers.



Division/Program news

2009 Public Health Week Poster Contest winners



Each year, Tarrant County Public Health sponsors a Public Health Week Poster Contest to commemorate National Public Health Week. The annual contest is open to students in grades 1 - 8 attending any Tarrant County school. The contest challenges the children to submit artwork that reflects the theme for the year. The theme of the 2009 contest: "Building the Foundation for a Healthy Tarrant County."

A winner is chosen from every grade, and they are invited, along with their teachers and family members, to attend a recognition ceremony at Tarrant County Commissioners Court. The 2009 winners attending the ceremony included (left to right): Justin Harper, Natalie Bartine, Lauren Jackson, Abigale Chamizo, and Ashley Reyes. To view the winning artwork, visit the 2009 Public Health Week Poster Contest Web page.



A vision for a healthier community

Tarrant County Public Health is creating a healthier community for all of our residents by partnering with Vision North Texas (VNT). VNT is a private, public and academic partnership, headed by Charter Sponsors: the Urban Land Institute, the North Central Texas Council of Governments, and the University of Texas at Arlington. Numerous partners of this collaboration are collectively focusing on the future quality of life, economic desirability and long-term sustainability of the 16-county North Central Texas region. The collaboration is increasing public awareness about important regional land use issues that affect mobility, air quality, water supply, health and other economic and environmental resources.

In addition, VNT is serving as a forum for discussion, education, research and decision-making about public- and private-sector actions to address these concerns. TCPH convened the Health Research Team for VNT that developed the health component of VNT by asking hospitals, insurance companies, educators, researchers and state representatives of the team to look at key health indicators within a set of five potential alternative models of community-built environments.

The identified indicators were then transformed into action tools that were incorporated into the VNT regional picture of healthy communities. Another product of the HRT was creation of a new principle to be included in the final set of twelve guiding principles for the region's growth and development.

Poverty Simulation workshop

On Sept. 25, TCPH facilitated a poverty simulation workshop for a group of 100 social services staff from partner agencies. Jointly planned with the Partnership for Stronger Communities' Education Committee, the simulation experience was designed to help sensitize participants to the realities faced by low-income people. Participants assumed the roles of up to 26 different families facing poverty with the task of providing basic necessities and



shelter during 15-minute "weeks" while interacting with various providers of needed social services. Following the experience, many noted their personal lack of awareness and committed to use what they learned from the simulation to improve their work and help people more effectively. Additional simulations are planned for 2010.

Unnatural Causes is an acclaimed documentary produced by California Newsreel that explores America's racial and social economic inequities in health. The series, originally aired on PBS, crisscrosses the nation uncovering startling new findings that suggest there is much more to our health than bad habits, health care, or random genes. The social circumstances in which we are born, live and work can actually disrupt our physiology as much as germs and viruses.

In 2009, there were several viewings of Unnatural Causes; some were within the community, one at the Bi-national Health Symposium as well as a few at Tarrant County Public Health for staff, community leaders and other health providers. The documentary was used to initiate discussions on social determinants of health, root causes of health disparities, and to highlight the need for collaboration to achieve health equity in Tarrant County. The documentary is a wonderful tool that can be used to begin the health equity conversation.



Tarrant County Public Health

Safeguarding Our Community's Health

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Tarrant County Commissioners Court

B. Glen Whitley	County Judge
Roy C. Brooks	Commissioner, Precinct 1
Marti VanRavenswaay	Commissioner, Precinct 2
Gary Fickes	Commissioner, Precinct 3
J. D. Johnson	Commissioner, Precinct 4
G. K. Maenius	County Administrator