

# Improving First Responder Vaccination Coverage and Disaster Response Preparation

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A blue rectangular banner with a subtle geometric pattern. At the bottom left is the Texas Health and Human Services logo. To its right, the text "TEXAS Health and Human Services" is written in white. Further to the right, separated by a thin vertical line, is the text "Texas Department of State Health Services" in white.

# Background



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Services

Texas Department of State  
Health Services

## Lessons Learned from Hurricane Harvey in 2017

- Many first responders were unvaccinated or unaware of their status prior to deployment, leading to urgent requests for vaccines.
  - Many may have been re-vaccinated for diseases they already had immunity against.
- The delay between vaccine administration and protection placed many first responders at risk for disease.
- The delay also increased the risk of first responders spreading diseases to their communities and loved ones.



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## CDC Immunization Recommendations for Disaster Responders:

- **Tetanus:** Responders should receive a tetanus booster if they have not been vaccinated for tetanus during the past 10 years.
  - **Td (tetanus/diphtheria) or Tdap (tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis)** can be used.
  - Getting the Tdap formula for one tetanus booster during adulthood is recommended to maintain protection against pertussis.
- **Hepatitis B:** The Hepatitis B vaccine series is recommended for persons who will be performing direct patient care or otherwise expected to have contact with bodily fluids.
- **Influenza:** All adults should receive an annual flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses. For more information on the flu vaccines, visit:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/prevention.htm>



## Potential Barriers to Vaccinations

- Lack of personal resources
  - Insurance coverage (underinsured, uninsured)
    - e.g., Volunteer first responder organizations who may not offer insurance coverage
  - Transportation (e.g., lack of car, public transportation)
  - Vaccination resources (e.g., clinics, support)
  - Time (e.g., working multiple jobs, vaccination not a priority)
- Lack of knowledge of vaccinations for first responders and of their importance
- Lack of immunization history
- Vaccine hesitancy



# First Responders Project



## First Responders Project

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) awarded the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Immunization Program funds in 2019 as part of the Crisis Cooperative Agreement.
- The Texas DSHS Immunization Program partnered with local health department (LHD) grantees.
- Goal: To increase vaccination coverage among first responders in preparation for disaster response.

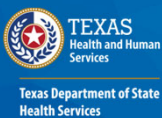


## First Responders Project Objectives

- Build sustainable relationships with first responder organizations.
- Educate first responders on importance of vaccines and save their records with targeted information.
- Raise first responder vaccine coverage rates.
  - Td/Tdap, HepB, Flu specifically
- Long-term documentation of first responder vaccinations through state IIS.
  - Texas Immunization Registry, ImmTrac2



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## First Responders Project Activities

### LHD grantees performed targeted outreach activities to identified Texas first responder organizations.

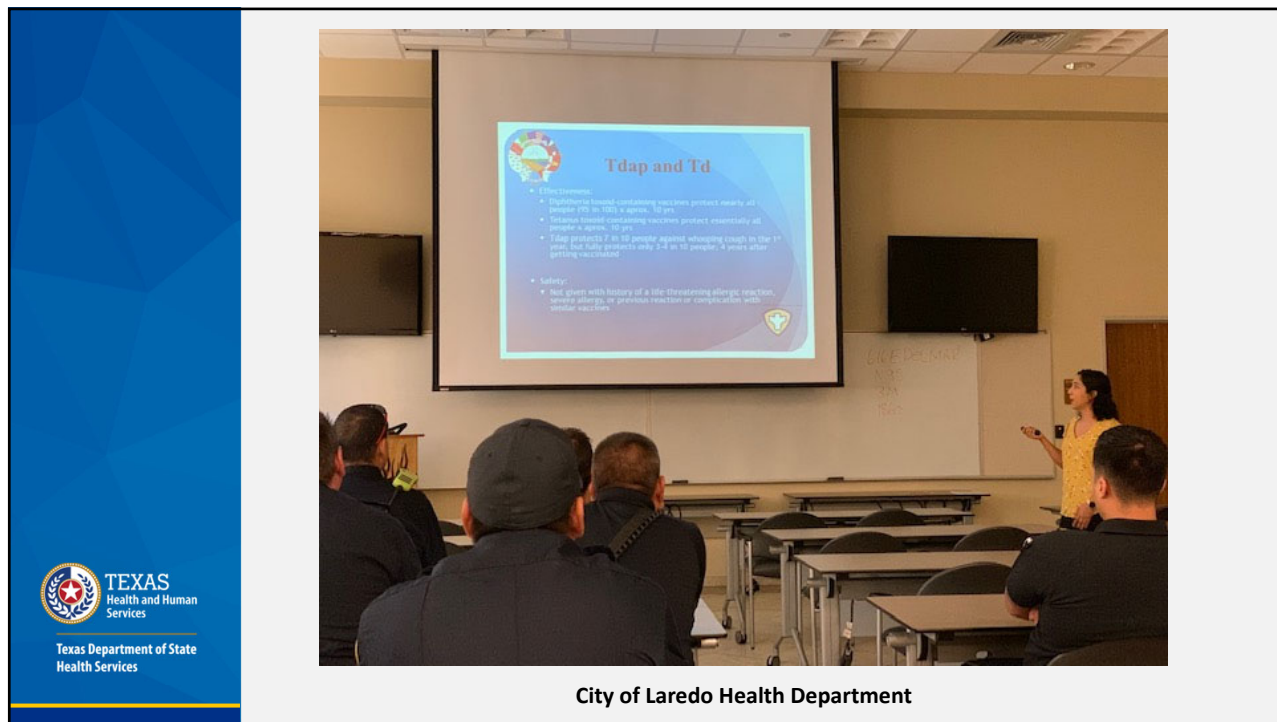
- Built rapport with agency leadership and staff
- Distributed educational materials on vaccines.
  - e.g., program and vaccine materials, NVAC Standards for Adult Immunization
- Conducted trainings for participation in ImmTrac2.
- Provided resources on obtaining vaccinations.
  - Partnered with local organizations to schedule immunization events (e.g., health fairs, drive through clinics, mobile clinics)
  - Texas Adult Safety Net (ASN) Program



## First Responders Project Successes

- Increased number of vaccinated first responders by **190%**.
- Increased number of first responders consented in ImmTrac2 by **176%**.
- Development of standard operating procedures meant to encourage vaccination and documentation in some first responder agencies.
  - Vaccinating new first responder staff and consenting them into ImmTrac2
- Development of outreach strategies targeting first responders with vaccination information.
  - e.g., social media campaign, educational video
- Strengthened relationships for project goal sustainability after project's conclusion
  - COVID-19 vaccinations during pandemic, mass clinics





## First Responders Project Successes

Immunization	Baseline - 3/11/2019	Final - 7/6/2021	% Increase
Hep A series	10,887	21,323	<b>96%</b>
Hep B series	16,069	28,366	<b>77%</b>
MMR series	15,971	27,979	<b>75%</b>
HPV series	4,851	7,941	<b>64%</b>
1 dose of PCV and PPSV vaccines	509	1,509	<b>196%</b>
1 tetanus-containing vaccine dose in the last 10 years	26,085	38,102	<b>46%</b>
MenB series	535	2,400	<b>349%</b>
1 Flu dose in the last 12 months	7,230	8,603	<b>19%</b>
Varicella series	8,218	16,690	<b>103%</b>
Zoster series	598	1,620	<b>171%</b>

**NOTE: Flu based off doses administered during each calendar year**



## First Responders Project Challenges

- COVID-19 Pandemic
  - Prevented LHD staff from entering workspaces.
  - Redirected LHD resources away from the project to containing the pandemic.
  - Slowed project activities and administration of other vaccines considerably.
- Barriers in hiring and retaining staff within LHDs.
- Negative attitudes towards vaccines and the project among first responder agencies.



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# Adult Safety Net (ASN) Program



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## Adult Safety Net (ASN) Program

### Program Information

- The ASN Program supplies vaccines at no cost to enrolled providers.
- Increased access to adult vaccines for eligible populations.
- Removes financial barriers of receiving adult vaccines for eligible populations.

### Eligibility

#### Patients:

- 19 years of age or older, and
- No health insurance (uninsured)

#### Providers:

- Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)
- Rural Health Center (RHC)
- Local Health Department
- State Health Department
- Federally Recognized Indian Tribes



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# ASN Contact Information

Email: [ASNInfo@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:ASNInfo@dshs.texas.gov)

ASN Program Website:  
<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/immunize/ASN/>



# Thank you!

