

Texas Preventable Disease

NEWS

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Texas Board of Health

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Answers to the Most Frequently Asked
Questions About Disease Reporting:
Part I

TEXAS STATE DOCUMENTS
COLLECTION



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ANSWERS TO THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT DISEASE REPORTING: PART I

Two years have passed since the Bureau of Epidemiology, Texas Department of Health (TDH), installed a microcomputer system for the surveillance of reportable diseases. We would like to answer some of the questions many of you have had regarding disease reporting. The information has been divided into two sections. This week's issue will cover morbidity reporting questions. Part II, to be published next week, will address disease-specific questions.

Included in this issue is a copy of the revised "Reportable Diseases in Texas" (6-101a), which includes the most recent change in the reporting laws: the addition of occupational disease reporting. The 6-101a is an informational supplement to the EPI-1 (Notifiable Disease Report) and may be provided to hospitals, physicians, schools, etc.

MORBIDITY REPORTING

1. Q: Who is responsible for reporting cases of infectious disease?

A: The Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Act requires physicians and local school authorities to report immediately any suspect or confirmed case of a reportable disease to their local health authority or to the Bureau of Epidemiology. If for any reason the case has not been reported as required, the law allows nurses, laboratory directors, hospitals, day-care center and nursing home directors and administrators, military installations, professional health workers, and even parents to report suspect cases of reportable diseases to their local health authority.

2. Q: Who is responsible for reporting cases of occupational disease?

A: The Occupational Disease Reporting Act requires physicians and laboratory directors to report promptly any suspect or confirmed case of a reportable occupational disease to their local health authority.

3. Q: Is there a recommended procedure for reporting cases of disease?

A: Cases should be reported to the local health authority by telephone or in writing.

Designated reporting agents (local health authorities) have the option of using the Notifiable Disease Report, EPI-1 (formerly C-15), or the toll-free number: 1-800-252-8239 to report cases to the Bureau of Epidemiology. The toll-free number is to be used only for reporting communicable and occupational diseases.

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- 4. Q: Can cases of venereal disease and tuberculosis be reported on the Notifiable Disease Report?**
- A: No. Venereal disease and tuberculosis morbidity data are maintained separately by the Bureau of Communicable Disease Services, TDH. Syphilis and gonorrhea cases are to be reported on form J-27, Confidential Report of Venereal Disease. Cases of tuberculosis should be reported on Report of Case and Patient Services, form TB-400.
- Additional information on the reporting of venereal disease is available from the Sexually Transmitted Disease Control Division at (512) 458-7225.
- Information on the reporting of tuberculosis may be obtained by calling the Tuberculosis Control Division (512) 458-7447.
- 5. Q: Who is my local health authority?**
- A: Your local health authority is the director of an organized health unit, department, or district; if there is none in your area, then the director of your Texas public health region is your local health authority. If you require more information, contact the Bureau of Epidemiology at (512) 458-7218.
- 6. Q: Which diseases require the completion of case investigation forms?**
- A: AIDS, acute occupational pesticide poisoning, arboviral infections, asbestosis, infant botulism, brucellosis, congenital rubella syndrome, dengue, elevated blood lead in adults, Hansen's disease, legionellosis, leptospirosis, malaria, measles, pertussis, psittacosis, Q fever, relapsing fever, Reye syndrome, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, rubella, silicosis, tetanus, toxic-shock syndrome, trichinosis, tularemia, typhoid fever, typhus fever (endemic), yellow fever. (At this time, case investigation forms for the four reportable occupational diseases are being completed in the Bureau of Epidemiology.)
- 7. Q: How can I obtain morbidity reporting forms (EPI-1) and case investigation forms?**
- A. An initial supply of the Notifiable Disease Report (EPI-1) is being distributed to designated reporting agents throughout Texas. Additional forms (ie, EPI-1 and case investigation forms) may be obtained by calling the Bureau of Epidemiology in Austin at (512) 458-7218.
- The Bureau of Epidemiology will automatically forward blank investigation forms to the local health authority or public health region in those instances where a special surveillance form is required.
- 8. Q: When should cases be reported?**
- A: A few reportable diseases (see 6-101a, insert) such as botulism, should be reported immediately. This may be accomplished using the toll-free number 1-800-252-8239. For the majority of diseases, we recommend that cases be reported to your local health authority as they occur, but no less often than once a week. The reporting law requires local health authorities to report to the Texas Department of Health at weekly intervals.

REPORTABLE DISEASES OF TEXAS

The Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Act (Texas Civil Statutes, Article 4419b-1) authorizes measures for the control of communicable diseases and for the establishment of methods of procedure for reporting them. The Texas Board of Health, under authority of that Act, has issued rules (25 Texas Administrative Code, §§ 97.10) implementing the act, including the designation of certain communicable diseases as reportable.

Diseases to be Reported Immediately by Telephone to the Texas Department of Health in Austin

(CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-252-8239)

Botulism
Cholera
Diphtheria

Measles
Plague

Poliomyelitis, Paralytic
Yellow Fever

Diseases Reportable by Name

Acquired Immune Deficiency
 Syndrome
Amebiasis
Anthrax
Bacterial or Viral Meningitis
 (specify etiology)
Botulism
Brucellosis
Campylobacteriosis
Cholera
Coccidioidomycosis
Congenital Rubella Syndrome
Dengue
Diphtheria
Encephalitis (specify etiology)
Gonorrhea
Hansen's Disease

Hepatitis, Viral
 Type A
 Type B
 Non-A, Non-B
 Unspecified
Histoplasmosis
Legionellosis
Leptospirosis
Malaria
Measles
Meningococcal Infections
Mumps
Pertussis
Plague
Poliomyelitis, Paralytic
Psittacosis
Q Fever
Rabies in Man

Relapsing Fever
Reye Syndrome
Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever
Rubella
Salmonellosis
Shigellosis
Syphilis
Tetanus
Toxic Shock Syndrome
Trichinosis
Tuberculosis
Tularemia
Typhoid Fever
Typhus Fever
 Endemic (Murine)
 Epidemic
Viral Hemorrhagic Fever
Yellow Fever

Diseases Reportable by Numerical Totals

Chickenpox
Influenza & Flu-like Illness

Streptococcal Sore Throat
Scarlet Fever

Occupational Diseases Reportable by Name

Acute Occupational Pesticide Poisoning
Asbestosis
Elevated Blood Lead in Adults (blood lead $\geq 40 \mu\text{g/dl}$ in persons ≥ 15 years of age)
Silicosis

The Texas Board of Health also has designated by rule 25 TAC, §§ 99.1 certain occupational diseases as reportable, under authority of the Occupational Disease Reporting Act, Chapter 931, Article 19, Acts of the 69th Legislature, Regular Session, page 6741 et seq. (Texas Session Laws Service (Vernon's) to be codified as TCS Art. 5182c).

In addition to the requirements of individual case reports, any unusual or group expression of illness, whether related to communicable disease, occupationally caused sickness, or due to an unknown cause, which may be of public health concern should be reported to the Texas Department of Health in Austin, through the local health authorities, or to the State Epidemiologist directly by the most expeditious means.

The Venereal Disease Act (Art. 4445d, TCS, amended) and the Tuberculosis Code (Art. 4477-11, TCS, amended) require the reporting of cases of syphilis and gonorrhea and tuberculosis, respectively. Form J-27, "Confidential Report of Venereal Disease," is used to report syphilis and gonorrhea, and Form TB-400, "Report of Case and Patient Services," is used to report tuberculosis.

Your cooperation in promptly securing these reports helps all Texans and is greatly appreciated.

Reports of these diseases may be made in writing to the Texas Department of Health in Austin or directly by calling the toll-free number:

1-800-252-8239



9. Q: If additional information becomes available after the case is reported, should we notify our reporting agent?

A. Yes. If additional information becomes available after the initial report has been made, a corrected report is appropriate. Examples include providing patient data such as age, race, date of onset, or a specific diagnosis. The latter is especially important when laboratory results become available and an etiologic agent is identified (eg, hepatitis is determined to be type A, or meningitis is determined to be caused by Neisseria meningitidis).

10. Q: What if the exact date of onset of illness for communicable diseases cannot be established?

A. Reporting agents are strongly encouraged to make every possible effort to obtain a date of onset for each case reported. If the date of onset cannot be established, we recommend substituting one of the following dates listed in order of preference: a) date of first physician contact due to symptoms, b) date of specimen collection, c) date of hospital admission, d) date of laboratory confirmation, or e) date of death.

11. Q: Should I report cases of reportable diseases which occur in military personnel or their dependents?

A. Yes. All cases of reportable disease in Texas, whether occurring in the military or civilian population, are required to be reported. Military personnel are considered residents of Texas unless a permanent out-of-state address is given.

12. Q: Should I report cases living outside my county? Outside Texas?

A. An individual case of reportable disease is recorded by the patient's city/county of residence. Even if a case is diagnosed in your county, but resides elsewhere, please report the case to us. All cases of reportable disease are required to be reported. A case living outside your county, but hospitalized in your area, will not appear in your county's morbidity data.

Texas participates in a system of interstate reciprocal notification of disease. Therefore, residents of other states who are hospitalized and diagnosed in Texas should also be reported. The Bureau of Epidemiology has the responsibility of notifying the appropriate public health officials in the state where the patient resides.

13. Q: If a Texas resident acquires a reportable disease outside the United States, should I report it?

A. Yes. The diseases most often imported into the United States are typhoid fever, malaria, dengue, poliomyelitis, and measles. When you make the report to us, be sure to mention that the exposure occurred outside the US. It is important epidemiologically to distinguish between imported and indigenous cases of disease.

14. Q: What happens if the same case gets reported twice, by different reporting agents?

A. This is a common event. Therefore, the microcomputer surveillance system in use by the Bureau of Epidemiology automatically checks for

duplicate reports so that they may be deleted. In addition, the data are routinely reviewed by bureau personnel to assure their accuracy.

15. Q. Should a death resulting from a "reportable disease" be reported as a case?

A: Yes. Any death resulting from a reportable disease should be reported as a case; however, the death should also be noted as part of the report.

16. Q. Should communicable or occupational diseases other than those included in the law also be reported?

A: If there is ever any doubt about whether a communicable or occupational disease should be reported, REPORT IT! It is not unusual for an epidemiologist to maintain surveillance on a disease even though there is no requirement of notification. Examples of these communicable diseases followed by our epidemiologists include Lyme disease, Vibrio infections other than cholera, listeriosis, cryptosporidiosis, Kawasaki disease, and leishmaniasis.

Reporting agents are also reminded that **any unusual cluster of disease is reportable.**

17. Q. What happens to all this information after it is reported?

A: Once the data are received by the Bureau of Epidemiology in Austin, cases are immediately entered into the computerized surveillance system. The data are routinely reviewed by epidemiologists who look for any unusual occurrences or clusters of disease, fluctuations in morbidity, seasonal variations, and changes in disease distribution. A statistical summary of the data is published monthly in Texas Preventable Disease News and yearly in Reported Morbidity and Mortality in Texas - Annual Summary.

Nevertheless, the Bureau of Epidemiology requests that clusters or outbreaks of disease be reported **directly** to the epidemiologists by calling **(512) 458-7328** or **1-800-252-8239** in addition to notifying the local health authority.

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