March 2025

Region 8 Zoonosis Control Newsletter

Public Health Region 8 | Zoonosis Control
Texas Department of State Health Services
Region 8 - Zoonosis Control | Region8.Zoonosis@dshs.texas.gov

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Warmer Weather & Hot Topics

By: Amanda Kieffer

As we spring into warmer weather, it's a good reminder that zoonotic diseases don't take a season off! In this issue, we are reviewing annual rabies trends and reportable disease data along with some important updates on avian influenza and Chagas disease. Recently, our own Rachel Panneton participated in the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program (ORVP), so be sure to check out that article and find out about this important health initiative. Stay cool, stay informed, and before we know it, summer will be just around the corner!

Zoonosis News

HPAI Detected in Black Vultures in Region 8

On February 12, 2025, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) confirmed multiple black vultures at Landa Park in New Braunfels tested preliminary positive for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). On February 24, the San Antonio Zoo also announced a black vulture tested non-negative for HPAI. HPAI is known to currently circulate among wild birds in Texas and previous detections have occurred in other regions. These are the first wildlife detection of HPAI in Region 8. For more information see: TPWD News Release.

Rabies Poster Contest Deadline: April 4, 2025

The deadline for the 2025 Rabies Poster Contest is approaching! All posters must be submitted by April 4, 2025. The contest is open to all Texas K-12 students Visit link below to learn more!
Rabies Awareness and Prevention Poster Contest | Texas DSHS

2025 Rabies Update & Map

Rabies Update: January – February 2025

So far this year, we have had four positive foxes (57%) and three positive bats (43%).

2025 Positive Animal Rabies Cases, Region 8

January 1, 2025 – February 28, 2025

County	Bat	Cat	Dog	Fox	Raccoon	Skunk	Other	All
Bexar	1							1
Comal				4				4
Victoria	2							2
Total	3			4				7

2024 Rabies Update & Map

Annual Rabies Update: January – December 2024

In 2024, thirty-two bats made up 38% of all positive cases reported. Followed by twenty-three skunks (27%), twenty-two foxes (26%), five cats (6%), two raccoons (2%), and one coyote (1%).

2024 Positive Animal Rabies Cases, Region 8

January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024

County	Bat	Cat	Dog	Fox	Raccoon	Skunk	Coyote	All
Bexar	12							12
Comal	5	4		13		2	1	25
Gillespie	2					1		3
Gonzales						2		2
Guadalupe	6							6
Kendall				6		2		8
Kerr	2	1		2	2	7		14
Lavaca						2		2
Medina	2							2
Uvalde	1							1
Victoria	2			1		7		10
Total	32	5	0	22	2	23	1	85

Human Notifiable Zoonoses

By: Jon Stewart

2024 Reportable Zoonotic Disease Cases in Humans, Region 8*

January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024

Condition	Confirmed	Probable	Suspect	All
Chagas		2	1	3
Dengue*+	1	8	3	12
Malaria+	4			4
Typhus, flea-borne *(endemic, murine)*	3	31		34
West Nile Virus, Neuroinvasive	1			1
Total	9	41	4	54

2025 Reportable Zoonotic Disease Cases in Humans, Region 8*

January 1, 2025 – February 26, 2025

Condition	Confirmed	Probable	Suspect	All
Dengue*+	1			1
Total	1			1

* *DSHS case counts may differ from those reported by local jurisdictions as DSHS does not report cases until epidemiological investigations are complete. Totals listed do not include those investigated by other Local Health Departments (SAMHD).*

\+ *Case counts from these conditions include travel-related infections acquired outside of Texas or outside of the United States by residents of PHR 8.*

A Bird's Eye View of Avian Influenza

By: Amanda Kieffer

Avian Influenza, or bird flu, is a viral disease affecting birds worldwide. Low pathogenic (LPAI) strains circulate naturally in wild birds and can infect poultry causing mild illness. Highly pathogenic (HPAI) strains, however, cause severe illness and high mortality in affected species, with symptoms such as respiratory distress and sudden death. HPAI can spread rapidly among affected birds and lead to significant losses.

Avian influenza was first detected in the United States in 2014 in wild birds and poultry. Since then, these viruses have continued to emerge and evolve globally. While most avian influenza viruses do not infect people, certain strains – especially H5N1 and H7N9 – have caused human illness. Human infections are rare but can occur through close contact with infected birds and mammals or their environments.

In March 2024, the avian influenza virus H5N1 was found in dairy cows in Texas and Kansas for the first time. In April 2024, a Texas resident was infected with H5N1 after contact with potentially infected dairy cows. This was the first known case of mammal-to-human transmission of H5N1 avian influenza. More cases of avian influenza continue to be identified in humans (CDC Data) and animals (USDA-APHIS Data).

Public Health Guidance

There are several steps you can take to help prevent the spread of HPAI and other zoonotic diseases that affect birds and mammals. Below are some helpful reminders:

Report Sick or Dead Animals to Authorities

People and animals should not have contact with sick or dead animals. Unexplained die-offs of birds or other species should be reported to state or federal wildlife agencies.

Report sick or dead **wild animals** to Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD): 1-800-792-1112

Report sick or dead **poultry or livestock** to the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC): 1-800-550-8242

Report sick or dead **domestic pets** to your local veterinarian or animal control agency.

Use Proper Protective Equipment (PPE)

Flu viruses can be shed in the saliva, nasal secretions, and feces of infected animals. People and animals can be infected through contaminated surfaces, water, and animals. Proper PPE can prevent infection. If you are handling sick or dead animals with possible bird flu, always wear disposable gloves and respiratory (N95 or higher) and face protection. *For more recommendations, visit: PPE For Bird Flu Workers*

Stay Informed

As new information becomes available, be sure to educate yourself and others about best practices.

For more information on avian influenza, visit the websites below.

https://www.dshs.texas.gov/influenza-flu-provider-information/avian-influenza-bird-flu
https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/index.html
https://www.tahc.texas.gov/emergency/avianinfluenza.html
https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/season/waterfowl/flu/
https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza

Chagas Disease

By: Jon Stewart

Chagas disease, or American trypanosomiasis, is caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi* (*T. cruzi*) and transmitted through contact with the feces of triatomine bugs ("kissing bugs"). It affects humans, dogs, and other animals across the world, with most cases concentrated in Latin America. In the U.S., around 300,000 people—mostly those born in or migrating from high-risk countries—are infected. Locally acquired cases in Texas are uncommon but do occur (Chagas Disease Data, TX).

The disease has both acute and chronic presentations, and up to 70-80% of people infected may never develop symptoms. People can find out if they're infected through laboratory testing and/or blood donor screening. The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) can test triatomines for the presence of *T. cruzi* and advise clients on exposure risks and testing recommendations. Triatomine Submission and Testing

Three species of kissing bugs that can be found in Texas. Left to right: Triatoma sanguisuga, Triatoma gerstaeckeri, Triatoma protracta.

(Photo: Gabriel L. Hamer)

https://kissingbug.tamu.edu/

Laboratory Diagnosis

Acute Chagas disease is diagnosed via microscopic identification of *T. cruzi* in blood smears or detection of *T. cruzi* DNA by polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Providers wishing to submit samples to the state lab for acute Chagas testing (PCR) must consult with the DSHS Regional Zoonosis Control (ZC) program before sample submission.

Chronic Chagas disease is diagnosed by serologic testing. To confirm infection, a patient must test positive via two or more serologic tests that use different parasite antigen preparations to detect *T. cruzi*-specific antibody. Serologic screening is available at the DSHS laboratory or one of the commercial laboratories that offer testing.

Testing Update

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is no longer performing confirmatory Chagas testing. Initial testing and repeat testing must happen at state or commercial labs. Patients testing positive with a single test at a commercial lab should have additional testing at the DSHS lab or commercial lab to confirm the diagnosis. Please see below for guidance.

DSHS Chagas Disease | Exposure Assessment and Testing Guidance

For additional information about Chagas disease or questions on testing, please contact Region8.Zoonosis@dshs.texas.gov.

Find more information about Chagas disease on the following websites:

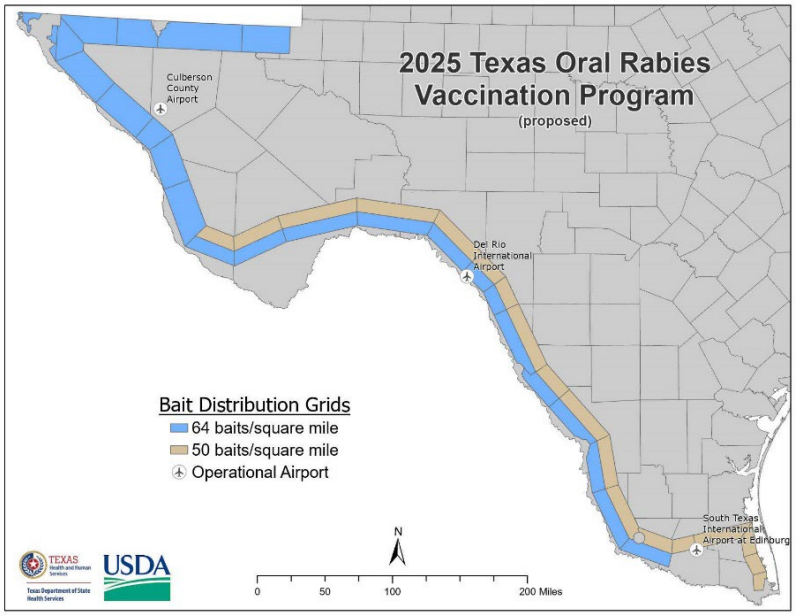
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Pan American Health Organization
World Health Organization
TAMU Kissing Bugs & Chagas Disease in the United States

2025 Oral Rabies Vaccination Program (ORVP)

By: Rachel Panneton

What is it?

The Oral Rabies Vaccination Program (ORVP) is completed once a year to control and prevent domestic dog/coyote variant rabies and gray fox variant rabies in Texas. This is done by an aircraft drop on targeted areas of an oral rabies vaccine bait coated in fish oil and fishmeal crumbles as an attractant. The main goal is to maintain a zone of vaccinated wildlife along the US-Mexico and Texas-New Mexico borders to prevent the reintroduction of rabies variants of concern. The map represents the Border Maintenance Zone encompassing this year's ORVP mission.



This Year's Summary

The 31st annual ORVP bait airdrop occurred January 7 – 23, 2025 along the Texas-Mexico and the Texas-New Mexico border with operations out of Van Horn, Del Rio, and Edinburg. Some weather- and equipment-related delays partially disrupted flight operations on two days and poor weather grounded all flights on January 20th. The project planners quickly reworked the flight schedules and routes to accommodate these hurdles and staff completed the project on schedule.

The team conducted bait distribution from fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters at 500 to 1,000 feet above ground level, flying over 33,513 miles among 93 separate flights. In total, they covered 17,474 square miles in 24 different counties and dispensed 1,051,500 oral rabies vaccine baits.

This project included collaboration of agency staff from the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Zoonosis Control (ZC), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Rabies Management Program, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service - Wildlife Services, Texas Wildlife Services, Texas State Guard, Dynamic Aviation, and Boehringer Ingelheim.

For more information on ORVP, visit the websites below:

https://www.dshs.texas.gov/rabies/oral-rabies-vaccination-program-orvp
https://www.dshs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/LIDS-Zoonosis/ORVP/Daytext.pdf

Announcements

Animal Control Office (ACO) Basic Course

April 30th – May 2nd, 2025 | Victoria, TX

The ACO Basic Course will meet the training requirements of HSC Chapter 829 and will include 12 hours of classroom instruction on the 1st and 2nd days with testing on the 3rd day.

To register contact Rachel Panneton at:
rachel.panneton@dshs.texas.gov / 210-774-1653

Diseases in Nature Conference (DIN)

May 21st – 23rd, 2025 | San Antonio, TX

DIN is a conference highlighting epidemiological investigations, clinical case studies, basic and applied research, and other topics in emerging and current zoonotic and environmentally acquired infectious diseases. The conference's goal is to increase knowledge and awareness of these diseases within the veterinary, medical, public health, and academic research communities.

Location: Westin San Antonio North
(9821 Colonnade Boulevard, San Antonio, TX 78230)

For more information: *https://www.diseasesinnature.com*

Future CE Course Topics

If you have any suggestions or requests for future CE Course topics, please let us know by emailing us at: Region8.Zoonosis@dshs.texas.gov

For More ACO CE Course Information:
https://www.dshs.texas.gov/notifiable-conditions/zoonosis-control/education/animal-control-officers/dshs-aco-training-course

ACO Manual Online

The ACO Training Manual is available for **free** on the *DSHS website*.

***Note**: Updates to the manual are posted and represented by dates in parenthesis beside each chapter.*

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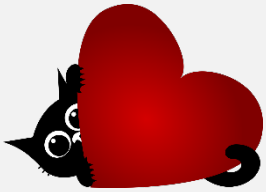

TEXAS Health and Human Services | Texas Department of State Health Services

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