The COVID-19 pandemic threatened our health and disrupted our way of life, significantly changing how we work, learn, socialize, and access health care. Yet, in looking back, the pandemic also offers an unprecedented opportunity to learn from response efforts at both a national and local level. We learned that Texans are resilient – and that there is more we can do to prepare. In 2021, with bipartisan support, the 87th Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1780 establishing the Texas Epidemic Public Health Institute (TEPHI) as a new state agency housed at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth), with the mission to prepare Texas communities for future infectious disease outbreaks.

**Our Background**

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**Our Approach**

- **Connecting** community leaders, industry experts, & public health professionals to improve resiliency statewide
- Providing **learning & training resources** to enhance the capacity of the Texas workforce and communities to prepare for future pathogen threats
- Promoting **public health communications** efforts that are clear, timely, effective, & science-based
- Developing **innovative systems** to detect & respond to disease outbreaks early

Collaborating with leaders in public health, science, medicine, and the community, TEPHI is analyzing the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and other major biological events to prepare Texas for the next public health emergency.
Highlights

From its base within UTHealth Houston, TEPHI leverages the system’s robust public health capabilities and has been able to lean into the UTHealth Houston School of Public Health’s pre-established relationships with community partners and leaders. A focus on community and collaboration is woven into each of TEPHI’s focus areas: readiness, training and resources, and communications. Below are just a few highlights of TEPHI’s innovative initiatives in these areas.

TexWEB: A Comprehensive Early Detection System
Collaborating with UTHealth Houston School of Public Health & Baylor College of Medicine, TEPHI has established TexWEB – the Texas Wastewater Environmental Biomonitoring network.

- An early detection system for community spread of viral pathogens beyond COVID-19
- Establishes a long-term program to detect & monitor viruses with outbreak potential
- Creates an early alert system to help coordinate public health responses
- Screens for: SARS + Variants | Influenza A & B | RSV A & B | Monkeypox | Norovirus | Zika Dengue | West Nile | Chikungunya | Polio | In Process: Measles & Enterovirus D68

Support for Rural Communities & Health Systems
In collaboration with the University of Texas El Paso, TEPHI has developed regionally tailored resource guides for rural counties in Texas highly impacted by COVID-19. These guides are a critical tool for rural communities, providing support with fundamental needs such as health care & food access. In addition, TEPHI has developed training modules for small rural healthcare systems to strengthen their capacity to respond to outbreaks.

Building a Sustainable Public Health Reserve Network
TEPHI is working to engage, train, & expand a statewide network of public health reservists. In pursuit of training this reserve network, TEPHI offers all Texas residents an online, no-cost Certificate in Pandemic Preparedness program. Additional in-person trainings have also been developed, geared towards Community Health Workers & Medical Reserve Corps volunteers, which emphasize engaging with & preparing their communities for future outbreaks.

Those looking for additional learning opportunities that highlight public health matters can also tune in to the “TEPHI Grand Rounds” webinar series. Topics have included monkey pox, public health law, vector-borne diseases, & more.

TEPHI Talks: Business-Centered Professional Development
The “TEPHI Talks” webinar series focus on preparing Texas businesses for future pandemics. These business-to-business webinars provide a space for Texas businesses to learn from industry leaders & are focused on building resiliency & maintaining operations when faced with a pandemic. These talks have featured leaders from key Texas businesses, including H-E-B, McKesson, & Dell Technologies.

Learn more, register for trainings, & find upcoming events @ tephi.texas.gov