



# Public Health Preparedness Update

## DCHHS Investigates Food Tampering at Area High School

On Tuesday, May 16, 2006, Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) deployed an investigation team, consisting of epidemiologists, environmental health and laboratory personnel, to Lake Highlands High School to investigate a possible case of food tampering. DCHHS staff interviewed 19 members of the Lake Highland High School faculty and staff regarding the incident. DCHHS completed testing for four food borne pathogens and additional forensics testing of materials collected during its investigation of the Lake Highlands High School incident.

The tests returned negative results for Salmonella, Listeria Monocytogenes, E. coli 0157:H7 and Ricin. At the request of DCHHS, the Dallas County Forensics Laboratory ran additional tests for possible narcotic agents. These tests revealed the presence of Tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, the main psychoactive substance found in the Cannabis



plant (marijuana).

“According to physician reports and patient interviews, patient symptoms are consistent with acute marijuana toxicity,” said Dr. John Carlo, DCHHS Medical Director. “Additionally, several of these patients have positive urine drug screens for cannabinoids.”

The joint investigation was conducted by members of the North Texas Joint Terrorism Task Force, which included DCHHS, the Dallas Police De-

partment, the Food and Drug Administration, the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Dallas FBI.

A swift response to a bioterrorism threat means quickly determining which bio-agent may be threatening a community by testing samples. Once a sample is delivered to DCHHS via law enforcement or medical personnel, lab staff can usually determine the cause agent in 24 to 48 hours.

“Dallas County citizens should be very proud of the work performed by the Dallas County Health and Human Services Laboratory,” said Zachary Thompson, DCHHS Director. “The DCHHS lab uses the latest technology in microbiology to detect bioterrorism agents and food borne pathogens. This is a great example of how Homeland Security monies are used to ensure the health and safety of our citizens on a day-to-day basis,” Thompson continued.

## Message from DCHHS Director Zachary Thompson

It's summer and Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) wants to remind everyone that heat-related deaths and illnesses are 100% preventable. DCHHS has two energy assistance programs funded by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs to help Dallas County residents.

The Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) provides the following assistance to income-eligible residents within Dallas County:

- assists households to develop goals for self-sufficiency through case management and co-pay utility plan;
- provides relief to low-income elderly and physically-impaired households vulnerable to the

high cost of home heating and cooling;

- provides one-time assistance in an energy/weather-related crisis; and
- addresses inefficient home heating and cooling appliances through a repair and replacement program.

The Weatherization Program (WAP) is designed to promote energy efficiency in the residence of low-income households in Dallas County. Utility cost could be reduced if more homeowners would install solar screens to reduce heat transfer, add caulking or sealant to existing windows, to reduce the infiltration or cold air in the winter and warm air in the summer. Adding or installing insulation in attics and ensuring efficient HVAC duct system can

also result in a substantial savings.

As always, please check on elderly and disable neighbors to make sure they have working AC units in their homes. If there are any questions regarding the CEAP and WAP program, please contact the DCHHS heat emergencies hotline at 214-819-6001.

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## DCHHS Receives \$42,000 Grant from Atmos Energy

Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) received a grant in the amount of \$41,981 from Atmos Energy's Sharing the Warmth Program, to assist elderly and low-income families pay their gas bills. This is the first donation made from Atmos Energy to DCHHS Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program (CEAP).

"Dallas County Health and Human Services is pleased to have entered into this partnership with Atmos Energy," said Zachary Thompson, DCHHS Director. "Thanks to Atmos Energy and their customers, our CEAP program will be able to help more Dallas County residents cover the rising costs of heating bills this winter," Thompson continued. The DCHHS CEAP program involves enhancing energy efficiency for low-income families. There are four components to the CEAP Program:

**Co-Payment** assists a household in developing goals for self-sufficiency



*Mike Greenwood, Manager Public Affairs for Atmos Energy Corporation presents check in the amount of \$41,981 to Zachary Thompson, Dallas County Health and Human Services Director.*

through case management, education and budget counseling;

**Elderly and Disabled** provides relief to the low-income elderly and disabled households most vulnerable to the high cost of energy;

**Heating and Cooling Systems** which provides for the replacement of heating

and/or cooling elements that result in energy savings for households; and

**Energy Crisis Program (ECP)** allows eligible households to receive utility assistance during times of weather related crisis. People may also qualify for portable heaters and/or cooling units in life-threatening situations.

"Atmos Energy's Sharing the Warmth Program, working with local energy-assistance agencies, has pledged \$385,000 so far this winter and the following months to help the elderly, disabled and families in need pay their natural gas bills," said Mike Greenwood, Manager, Public Affairs for Atmos Energy Corporation. "You can support neighbors in your community by donating to Sharing the Warmth. Details for making donations are located on the back of your Atmos Energy bill," Greenwood continued.

## Tips for a Healthy and Happy Summer

Officials with Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) encourage the public to exercise care in order to have a safe and enjoyable summer. "We all know that summers in Texas are hot and that the heat can be deadly, especially to the elderly, the very young and those with chronic medical conditions who do not have access to air conditioning," stated Zachary Thompson, DCHHS Director. "Dallas County Health and Human Services wants to make sure the citizens of Dallas County are made aware of simple things they can do to prevent heat-related illnesses and possible death."

Of particular concern are young children and the elderly. DCHHS officials ask that each Dallas County resident join in our **Each One Reach One** campaign to prevent heat-related deaths this summer. Citizens are asked to check on your neighbors to see if they have a working air conditioner unit in their home. In addition officials ask **all citizens** to follow a few simple precautions and warnings to stay safe in the sweltering sum-



mer months ahead:

- Know the first signs of heat-related illness - dizziness, nausea, headaches, muscle cramps. At the first sign, move to a cooler place, rest for a few minutes and slowly drink a cool beverage. Seek Medical attention IMMEDIATELY if symptoms do not improve!
- If you do not have air conditioning in the home, go to malls, libraries and other places with air conditioning;

- Drink plenty of fluids; avoid drinks containing alcohol, caffeine or sugar;
- Dress for the summer by wearing lightweight, light-colored clothing;
- Take cool baths and showers frequently;
- Exercise during evening and early morning hours when the temperature may be lower;
- Encourage children and the elderly to stay in the shade; and
- Check frequently on ill or elderly friends, relatives, neighbors who may need help.

DCHHS operates the Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) that offers energy assistance to low-income families in our community. For more information or to make an appointment, please contact the Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) at 214-819-1848 or visit our website at [www.dallascounty.org](http://www.dallascounty.org).

## DCHHS Pandemic Influenza Response Update

Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) continues its public education campaign to inform the community of the impact an influenza pandemic and the role each individual will need to play in order to protect their families. DCHHS has been hard at work since October 2005 developing its response plan for Pandemic Influenza. So what else has been done to prepare?



- DCHHS Laboratory now has the capacity to test for the Avian Influenza.
- Secured funding to support pandemic influenza planning activities in Dallas County from the Meadows Foundation of Texas.
- Dallas County Commissioners Court approved three new positions to enhance DCHHS' pandemic influenza planning and surveillance activities.
- Launched a public information campaign: "Be Ready...Be Prepared".
- Published on-going series of articles in DCHHS monthly newsletter.
- Initiated regular pandemic planning meetings with the County's larger hospitals.
- Briefed the Dallas County Public Health Advisory Committee and Dallas County Commissioners' Court.

- Created general preparedness messages for the general public including "Frequently Asked Questions" fact sheet for the media, business and community, public sector and general public.
- Sent letters to municipalities and school districts in Dallas County urging pandemic preparation.
- Created comprehensive Pandemic Influenza Page on the website.
- Sent fax to Dallas County physicians and clinicians regarding international travel and rapid testing capability of DCHHS lab.
- Created Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Guidance and Personal Preparedness Guide documents.
- Contacted area day care centers, faith-based organizations, non-profit organizations, colleges, universities, and major corporations in Dallas County providing general guidance for

their planning efforts.

- Established speakers bureau to make presentations on pandemic influenza to interested partners.
- Made several presentations to municipalities and professional organizations in Dallas County.
- Participated in the Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce "Pandemic Influenza and Business...Are We Ready?" event.
- Hosted Region's first Pandemic Influenza Tabletop Exercise with 180 stakeholders in attendance.
- Updated Quarantine and Isolation documents and use of masks policy.
- Created a county-wide hospital surveillance system using Syndromic Surveillance.
- Served as expert panel during the made-for-TV movie *Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America*. Also, manned live studio phone bank answering more than 500 calls from the public.

The work is ongoing. This summer, staff has scheduled Pandemic Influenza Workshops for daycare centers, public schools, colleges and universities. Also, plans are being finalized for a Fall Pandemic Influenza Symposium. Anyone with questions or concerns about pandemic influenza may send an e-mail to [hhsinfo@dallascounty.org](mailto:hhsinfo@dallascounty.org) or visit our website at [www.dallascounty.org](http://www.dallascounty.org).

## DCHHS Answers Questions About Foreign Travel

**I'm planning a trip this summer to a country where there have been some cases of Avian Influenza. Should I cancel my trip? Or what precautions should I take?**

The risk of avian influenza to travelers is very low. Only rare cases of human infection with avian influenza have occurred, and there has been no sustained human to human transmission. Travelers to areas affected by avian influenza in birds are not considered to be at elevated risk of infection unless direct and unprotected exposure to infected birds occurs.

### Traveling to an affected area:

- Avoid contact with live poultry and wild birds;
- Avoid visiting live animal mar-

kets and poultry farms;

- Avoid contact with surfaces contaminated with animal droppings/feces/blood;
- Avoid handling dead birds;
- Do not eat or handle undercooked or raw poultry, egg or duck; and
- Exercise good personal hygiene with frequent hand washing.

### After You Return from an Infected Area:

Monitor your health for 10 days. If you become ill with a fever plus cough, sore throat, or trouble breathing during this 10 day period, consult a healthcare provider. Before you visit your health care provider inform them of your symptoms, where you traveled, if you have had direct contact with poultry or close

contact with any severely ill person or persons.

Dallas County Health and Human Services has contacted area physicians and clinics to make them aware of the need to collect travel information for persons they treat for flu-like symptoms.

### If You Become Sick While Traveling:

If you become sick with symptoms such as a fever accompanied by a cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing or if you develop any illness that requires prompt medical attention, a U.S. Consular officer can assist you in locating medical services and informing your friends and family. For more information, consult the U.S. Department of State website at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\\_1185.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html).

## DCHHS Celebrates National HIV Testing Day - June 27th

Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) is joining with thousands of HIV counseling and testing sites, state and local health departments, and community-based HIV/AIDS service providers from across the country to participate in National HIV Testing Day (NHTD). DCHHS will offer free HIV tests at its Stemmons location on Monday, June 27, 2006. NHTD is an annual campaign produced by the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA-US) to encourage at-risk individuals to receive voluntary HIV counseling and testing.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 180,000 to 280,000 people nationwide are HIV-positive but are unaware of their status. HIV counseling and testing enables people with HIV to

take steps to protect their own health, that of their partners, and helps those who test negative get the information they need to stay uninfected.

“There is a special need to reach out to communities with increased risk of HIV infection, including African American and Latino populations, both of which are disproportionately affected with HIV when compared to other demographic groups in the United States,” said Zachary Thompson, DCHHS Director. “I encourage everyone to know your HIV status by getting tested.”

DCHHS offers HIV and STD testing at its main location, 2377 North Stemmons Freeway, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information about HIV and STD testing at DCHHS or for the location where the mobile

medical clinic will be testing, call 214-819-1980. For a complete list of our NHTD activities, visit our website at [www.dallascounty.org](http://www.dallascounty.org)

*Public Health Preparedness Update* is published monthly by:

Dallas County Health and Human Services  
2377 North Stemmons Freeway  
Dallas, TX 75207  
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