

Public Health Newsletter

BASTROP COUNTY PUBLIC
HEALTH DEPARTMENT



7 April 2025



National Public Health Week

Chronicling National Public Health Week Alongside the Bastrop County Public Health Department Creation

To mark the 2025 National Public Health Week, the Bastrop County Public Health Department (BCPHD) is announcing its creation and its role and responsibilities as the state's first local public health department to come into the Texas public health system in more than 30 years. National Public Health Week is aimed at chronicling the need for public health and nationwide efforts aimed at keeping every locality healthy and safe. This inaugural newsletter issue marks a significant moment in the history of public health in Bastrop County.

The Bastrop County Public Health Department was created by resolution by the Bastrop County Commissioners' Court in September 2023.

Thanks to a countywide Task Force appointed in January 2024, the Bastrop County Public Health Department was able to define county public health priorities based on a countywide health assessment and receive approval for an official Advisory Board of Health. While there is still a distance to go to being fully functioning, the BCPHD started building its capacity by hiring its first public health staff in October 2024.

We hope you enjoy learning more about the Bastrop County Public Health Department and local public health news and the road ahead. If you or anyone you know would like to be added to our email list to receive further Bastrop County public health updates, please contact us at public.health@co.bastrop.tx.us.

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you can expect:

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Collaborative

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Standing at the Forefront: The Vital Role of Our Bastrop County Advisory Board of Health

The Bastrop County Advisory Board of Health stands at the forefront of ensuring a healthier future for all in the county and its communities. Tasked with guiding public health initiatives and responding to pressing health challenges, this dedicated team of public health professionals plays a pivotal role in protecting and promoting the well-being of all residents.

One of their key responsibilities is to monitor the health status of the county. This involves identifying trends, assessing risks, and ensuring that emerging health threats are addressed promptly. Whether it's managing infectious disease outbreaks, tackling chronic health issues, or responding to natural disasters, the board provides critical oversight and direction.

Another essential function is developing and implementing policies to improve public health outcomes. This might include advocating for vaccination programs, supporting mental health services, or creating strategies to ensure a healthy and safe environment. Through collaboration with local organizations, healthcare providers, and government agencies, the board helps ensure that health policies are both effective and equitable.

Community education is also a cornerstone of their work. By empowering residents with knowledge, they enable people to make informed decisions about their health and lifestyle.

In addition, the Board oversees the equitable distribution of healthcare resources, ensuring that underserved populations have access to vital services. Their work helps to close gaps in healthcare access, fostering a healthier and more resilient community.

The Board's ultimate mission is rooted in service — to prevent disease, promote health, protect lives and nurture a thriving county. Their efforts remind us that public health is not just about responding to crises; it's about building systems and policies that prevent them, ensuring a healthier tomorrow.

Meet Your Newly Appointed Board of Health Members

- Roger Adams, BA, CMP (Representing the City of Elgin)
- William (Wick) Baker, MHS, BS, LFACHE
- Audrianna Esser, BA, QMHP
- Rajeev Gupta, MBBS, MD (Representing the City of Bastrop)
- Sue Iha, DrPH, MS, FNP (**Board Co-Chair**)
- Jackie May, RPH, CHW
- Cassidy Penn, Med (Representing the City of Smithville)
- William (Bill) Satterfield, DVM, BS (**Board Chair**)
- Linda Wilson, MD, BS

Differing Titles Yet Essential Partners in Public Health

Many of you have asked what's the difference between a local health authority and a local health department. First, a Local Health Authority by law is a physician appointed by the Bastrop County Court who has the legal authority and responsibility to enforce public health laws and regulations within a specific jurisdiction like Bastrop County. A local health authority makes critical decisions and responds to emergencies to protect the county's health.

Our local health authority is Pompeyo Chavez, MD.



Second, the Local Health Department is the actual governmental agency or organization responsible for delivering public health services, convening and engaging in collaboratives and partnerships, and enacting public health policies in a specific area like Bastrop County.

By law, the local health department is responsible for carrying out the 10 essential services of public health as defined by the Texas Health and Safety Code. Specific priorities of the county health department include infectious and chronic disease prevention and control, clinical services and access to care, health promotion and education programs and environmental health services to name a few.

The Executive Director of the Bastrop County Public Health Department is Donna Nichols, MSEd, CHES.

Transitioning Public Health Clinical Services from Texas DSHS Region 7 to BCPHD

A local health department provides special nursing and disease prevention services to keep people healthy. For over 40 years, the Texas Department of State Health Services Public Health Region 7 has provided clinical health services for Bastrop County through its Bastrop and Elgin clinics.

Over the next year or so, our new Bastrop County Public Health Department will begin to provide these clinical services.

As we transition these core services to the Bastrop County Public Health Department, we want to express our deep appreciation to the Texas Department of State Health Services Public Health Region 7 for improving the health, safety, and well-being of all in Bastrop County! Thank You!



Welcoming the Bastrop County Collaborative on Housing + Health

The Bastrop County Collaborative for Housing + Health is a multi-agency working group established to develop a community-led plan by the end of 2025 for an affordable housing project that will increase access to housing and center health equity for its residents and the wider community. The work of the Collaborative is funded by a grant from the St. David's Foundation and is administered by the Bastrop County Public Health Department. Our current official partners include Bastrop County, The City of Bastrop*, The City of Elgin*, The City of Smithville, Bastrop County Cares, Bastrop County Long Term Recovery Team, Career Tracks, and the HEAL Alliance. If you would like to get involved, or possibly engage as an official Partner please reach out to us at public.health@co.bastrop.tx.us.

Detecting Disease: Your Local Epidemiologist

My name is Andrew, and I am the BCPHD's Epidemiologist. Epidemiology is the study of how often diseases occur in different groups of people and why. It's a science of public health, focused on identifying the patterns, causes, and risk factors associated with health-related events (not just diseases, but also injuries, disabilities, and even positive health outcomes) within populations. At the county health department, an epidemiologist is a **"disease detective"** and plays a crucial role in protecting and improving the health of the local community through:

- Disease Surveillance
- Outbreak Investigation
- Data Analysis and Interpretation
- Resource and Technical Expertise
- Reporting Findings
- Contributing to Emergency Preparedness



Voicing Concerns About Environmental Health

Hi, I am Ruby, your local environmental health voice on all things related to air, soil, and water! Environmental health touches all of us, no matter who we are or where we live. As your environmental health specialist, I focus on clean air, water, and healthy soil, including during natural and man-made disasters. Our environment is a public health priority!

Globally, more than 6.5 million deaths are linked to air pollution each year, and the number of deaths has more than doubled in the past decade. Short-term exposure to high levels of outdoor air pollution has been linked to various health issues, including reduced lung function, asthma, heart problems, and increased emergency visits and hospitalizations.

I would love to hear your thoughts on the air quality in Bastrop County. Please reach out to us at public.health@co.bastrop.tx.us!

Educating the Public

One of the essential functions of public health is informing and educating the public about all aspects of health. My name is Adriana, and I serve as the health department's public health information specialist. That means that I am largely in charge of the communication aspect of the health department – whether that be meeting and networking with new and established partners, creating and sharing health information to be distributed to the county (i.e. measles education), or putting together helpful documents like this newsletter, among other things! Currently, I am in the process of working with the county to create a social media presence as well as a website for the health department.

CONTACT US

The Bastrop County Public Health Department is here to provide support in all aspects of Public Health. As we are a newly established health department, we are not yet functioning at full capacity. Please allow us some time to respond to any comments, questions, or feedback. We look forward to hearing from our community.

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