

Immunization Collaboration of Tarrant County: Community Groups Become Partners for Successful Outreach Effort

Formed in 1991 as a result of a 1990 measles outbreak infecting 300 local children, the **Immunization Collaboration of Tarrant County (ICTC)** is a grass-roots effort that cooperates with and supports existing government sponsored immunization programs.

Vaccines work. In 1994, another measles outbreak occurred with only eight confirmed cases. ICTC achieved this by sponsoring major immunization events, educating the community about the importance of immunization and providing financial and volunteer support to immunization outreach efforts.

Texas health officials have praised the Immunization Collaboration of Tarrant County as one of the first immunization coalitions in the state, and for more than 28 years we have continued to deliver a successful track record and serve as a model for other coalitions. We are the bridge between vaccine delivery, vaccine information and the general public. Today, in addition to traditional print and broadcast media, we get our message out through social media platforms, including internet (ICTChome.org), Facebook, and Twitter.

Measles: Effective and Immediate Response

Following the 1990 measles outbreak, just three isolated, non-related cases of measles were reported in Tarrant County. That changed in March 1994 with three cases of measles confirmed during one week. When the fifth case was confirmed, Tarrant County Public Health announced that measles immunizations would be provided free of charge until the outbreak was over.

ICTC stepped in to coordinate volunteers to administer the shots to large numbers of people at special clinics. We also conveyed the urgency of the situation with the media and posters and flyers. We held block walks in high-risk neighborhoods, distributing 25,000 flyers announcing the measles outbreak and urging people to obtain needed shots. While that seemed like a lot of flyers back then, today we distribute 90,000 ICTC event flyers each year just for the month of August!

In 1998, eight cases of measles were confirmed, with two hospitalizations. Everyone infected recovered. With our assistance, over 35,000 Tarrant County residents received measles shots during a four-week span. There was another outbreak in 2004 which was quickly contained, and in 2013 another measles outbreak occurred in a small unvaccinated colony. Everyone previously vaccinated was protected.

Innovative Methods

In early 1991, the two health department immunization teams were successfully immunizing 300 to 400 children per month. To build on this, the newly formed Collaboration organized the first **mall immunization campaign**, based on the notion that malls are highly visible and effective in reaching a broad spectrum of people in a safe, convenient environment. Held in August 1991 at two area malls, the event was publicized in English and Spanish through posters and flyers, print newspaper ads, and broadcast public service announcements.

The results were dramatic: 2300 children were immunized during the two-week campaign! Even better, in the last 28 years, **137,113 clients** have been immunized during the annual **ICTC Vaccine Event Campaigns**.

Additional Milestones

- **August 1991:** ICTC developed and provided vaccine information materials to the public at the mall vaccine campaigns. This has continued annually since that time, and today the print materials are augmented with social media messaging.
- **July 1992:** ICTC held its first day-long Fort Worth Zoo immunization event. The zoo gave free admission to any child receiving shots and the immediate family. Result: 683 children were immunized.

- **August 1992:** 5,669 more children were immunized in the second annual mall immunization event, which included a third mall. The Collaboration has repeated the immunization events every summer since 1991, reaching more than 137,113 children.
- **1993:** Two brightly painted *VacciVans* were obtained through State of Texas grant funds to support community outreach. Today we have three vans, including one that is a custom-configured clinic-on-wheels that allows us to hold vaccine clinics in locations that do not have the space or facilities to allow us to set up on site.
- **1994:** The Texas Department of Health's grass-roots public awareness campaign, *Shots Across Texas*, focused on the need to fully immunize children before the age of two.
- **2002:** The Hispanic Wellness Fair and the African-American Health Expo added ICTC vaccine clinics.
- **August 2004:** The Back to School Round-up added ICTC vaccine clinics.
- **2005:** Tarrant County Medical Society Alliance & Foundation, Inc. took a front seat with the Collaboration and the *Be Wise-Immunize* campaign. This key partnership continues today.
- **2011-2019:** New vaccine requirements for 7th grade and 16-18 year old students launched our school immunization program. With the help of the *VacciVans*, nurses and supplies, we traveled to schools in all 16 ISD's across Tarrant County where students were immunized in their schools. Always changing school required vaccines make it essential for ISD involvement. **In 2019, the teams immunized 2,551 children, giving 5,808 doses in 108 school locations.**

Each vaccine event requires many hours of service from nurses and clerical volunteers. Through **May 31, 2019**, using the Tarrant County Public Health immunization teams and the Collaboration, a combined **372,081 clients** received their immunizations. **In 2018, there were 9,847 clients and 21,442 doses of vaccine administered.**

Simple Coalition Model

The goals, structure and success of Immunization Collaboration of Tarrant County are easily replicable, given the right combination of resources, commitment and vision. Our model has been replicated, to varying degrees, in many counties across Texas. **For Tarrant County, 28 years of working as partners has created better health for everyone.** Key components for a successful collaboration include:

- Partnerships among public, private and non-profit sectors with power play left at the door
- Availability of vaccine through the Federal Vaccine for Children program
- Non-Profit Status for the Collaboration
- Volunteer management with people power skills
- Strong committed leadership and financial support
- Daily work force that have knowledge of the area

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