



FIELD OF BLUEBONNETS

HELPING FOOD SAFETY PARTNERS BLOOM

The Texas Rapid Response Team (TRRT) strives to improve foodborne illness investigation and food safety efforts throughout our state. As Texas is a home-rule state, the TRRT agencies do not have jurisdiction locally, where most food-related incidents begin. The TRRT relies on the strength and capabilities of our public health partners; therefore, the TRRT prioritizes partner support. The TRRT offers investigation assistance and foodborne illness-related training opportunities. We have developed several different training formats and resource sharing tools for local and regional health departments.



CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION SHARING

When investigating food-related incidents, the TRRT may need to share protected information with local health department partners to facilitate foodborne illness response. In the past, TRRT would provide redacted information, which may not have been very helpful to local health departments.

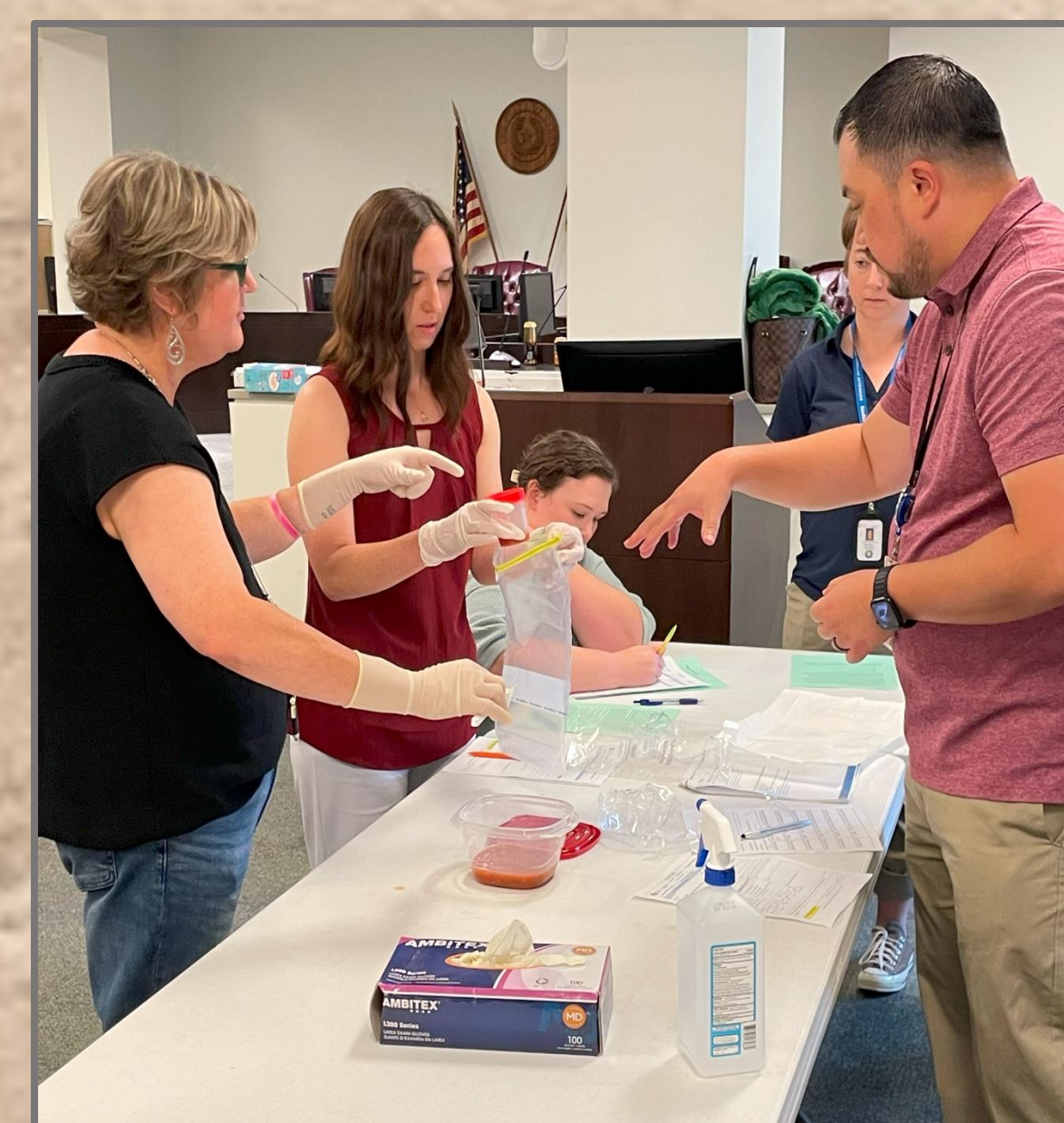
To improve communication flow and effectiveness, the TRRT began promoting a type of Information Sharing Agreement (ISA), known as a Long-Term Limited Scope Food, Feed and Cosmetics 20.88 Agreement, which allows Texas local health departments to receive non-public information from Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Food & Drug Administration (FDA). The TRRT and Texas Food Protection Task Force have held information sessions and distributed materials about the importance of entering into a 20.88 agreement. The agreements can be quickly executed and grants an entire program the ability to receive protected information at once. To date, over a dozen Texas Local Health Departments have 20.88 agreements.



FOOD SAMPLING TRAINING

The TRRT and Texas Food Protection Task Force along with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Retail Food Safety Operations have developed an Environmental Assessment and Sampling Training Course.

The Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response: Environmental Assessment and Food Sampling Training is a one-day, face-to-face training where participants review the roles of epidemiology, environmental health, and the Texas DSHS laboratory during an outbreak investigation and environmental assessment.



Participants engage in an interactive environmental assessment tabletop exercise and gain hands-on experience collecting food samples using aseptic techniques. This training is available to local and regional public health-staff and contact hours are offered for Registered Sanitarians.



FOODBORNE ILLNESS INVESTIGATION COURSE

The TRRT offers an online training course titled *Conducting Foodborne Illness Investigations*. The course was developed during COVID-19 when face-to-face training was not available. The online course continues to be a valuable resource for strengthening foodborne illness investigation knowledge statewide. Over 300 participants have taken the training to date.

This training provides an overview of investigating and managing foodborne illness outbreaks, including the subjects of:

- Steps of a foodborne illness outbreak investigation
- Pathogens that cause foodborne illness outbreaks
- Methods of detecting foodborne illness outbreaks
- Environmental assessments
- Traceback investigations, and
- Multi-jurisdictional investigations

Partners are also able to request training on individual course subjects.



Scan the QR code
above to take the
course



FOOD SAMPLING SUPPLY KITS

The TRRT and Texas Food Protection Task Force have sampling test kits that can be quickly provided to local and regional health departments in Texas if food samples are to be taken during a foodborne illness investigation. The kits were developed as a collaborative effort between the Brazos County Health Department and the Texas DSHS Food Safety Team. Kits are housed at a central location until a local health department in Texas needs the resources to collect samples in response to an outbreak. Partners are also able to receive just-in-time sampling training upon request for a sampling kit.

The kits contain a food and environmental sample collection guidance document, and necessary sampling materials including:

Q-swabs, whirl—pak bags, sterile gloves, chain-of-custody forms, sample, labels, and other materials.

