



Texas Emergency Medical Task Force COVID Response

First activated on February 6, and still activated today, a total of 1200 EMTF members, from 150 different agencies, have supported state COVID operations.

Lackland

On February 1, the US government announced that it would quarantine up to 250 Americans evacuated from China at Joint Base San Antonio Lackland. The Emergency Medical Task Force (EMTF)'s specialized Infectious Disease Response Unit (IDRU) pre-hospital component was activated by the State to treat and transport any of the evacuees that became symptomatic. IDRU ambulances remained dedicated to this mission until the final evacuee left the base.

On February 11, the IDRU transported a symptomatic evacuee to a local hospital where they tested positive for COVID-19. This marked Texas' first laboratory-confirmed case of the virus and the 15th overall in the United States. Less than a week later, an additional 144 evacuees were brought to San Antonio for quarantine from the Diamond Princess cruise ship. Many of these evacuees tested positive while under quarantine and were transported by the IDRU to the Texas Center for Infectious Diseases. A total of 387 evacuees were housed at Lackland with the last evacuee departing on March 25.

Texas Center for Infectious Diseases (TCID)

On February 19, the EMTF's specialized Infectious Disease Response Unit (IDRU) hospital component was activated to treat any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 from the Lackland evacuee cohort. The IDRU hospital component, comprised of specialty-trained physicians, nurses, and paramedics with specialty PPE, was provided a wing within the state's tuberculosis hospital (TCID) to treat the evacuees. The IDRU successfully treated a total of 15 patients within the walls of TCID at a time when limited treatment guidance was available.

Mobile Testing Teams (MTT)

On March 13, the EMTF created the first drive-through COVID testing site in Texas. The site, located in San Antonio, was so successful that it was moved to the Freeman Coliseum, a large sports and events venue, to expand operations. Four days after the first sample was collected at the drive-through site, the EMTF, through the local Regional Advisory Council, built testing software to register, manage, and provide results to those tested at any EMTF-supported drive-through site. This software was ultimately used to test and result more than 1 million Texans for COVID-19.

The EMTF's drive-through model became the template for the Texas Military Department's Mobile Testing Teams (MTT), which first became operational on April 19. Each MTT was trained at the Freeman Coliseum and had follow-up training on the road provided by the EMTF's IDRU. The MTT utilized the EMTF's testing software for the entirety of their testing operations and were supported by a member of the EMTF in each region. The drive-through testing sites brought COVID testing to rural parts of the state where testing would have otherwise been unobtainable. A total of 238 counties were provided a drive-through test via the MTTs.



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Nursing Homes and Rapid Assessment Quick Response Force (RA-QRF)

On May 11, Governor Abbott directed the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to “test 100% of residents and staff” in Texas nursing homes. The EMTF, in partnership with local jurisdictions, Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS), and the Texas Military Department (TMD), completed nearly 1,700 nursing home testing missions resulting in the testing of 210,000 nursing home staff and residents before transitioning the mission to private vendors.

In addition to nursing home testing, the EMTF’s Rapid Assessment Quick Response Force (RA-QRF) was deployed across to the state to provide initial triage, site assessment, review of the facility’s policies and procedures, personal protective equipment and infection control guidelines and provide recommendations to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in vulnerable populations. The first RA-QRF was deployed on May 1st to Brenham to assist with a COVID-19 outbreak at a local nursing home.

EMTF Lab Network

In May, the EMTF was tasked by DSHS and TDEM to oversee and build additional lab testing capacity for state supported testing sites. The EMTF Lab Network utilized a total of 12 labs, a mixture of private, hospital, public health, and universities, for COVID-19 testing. Test samples were flown into Austin from across the state each evening to the EMTF Lab Network's sorting and distribution hub. Samples were then either transported by ground or repackaged for additional flights to their assigned lab.

Nearly 250,000 Texans were tested through this lab network prior to its transition to private vendors.

EMTF State Coordination Center

On October 24, the EMTF State Coordination Center (SCC) was activated to coordinate the movement of critically ill patients out of the over-burdened hospitals in the El Paso region. Through collaboration with Regional Medical Operations Centers (RMOC) within the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), the SCC was able to identify and secure ICU beds in regions that had bed capacity. The SCC organized the air medical evacuation of over 200 patients from the El Paso region, which created additional bed capacity within El Paso for acute patients. On December 1, the SCC expanded its operations from El Paso to coordinate patient load-balancing operations across the state.

Surge Responses

The EMTF responded to assist regions with COVID surges (El Paso, Beaumont, Amarillo, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, Eagle Pass, and Del Rio) during the pandemic with technical assistance, ambulances, and field hospitals. The ambulances assigned to affected jurisdictions transported nearly 2,000 patients. A field hospital in El Paso treated and discharged close to 120 COVID-positive patients, freeing up critically needed hospital beds within the city.