TEXAS MOSQUITO CONTROL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

MAY 2025
VOLUME 45

Editor: Tiffany Walker
Contributors: Patrick Prather, Nina Dacko, Jeremy Verde, Kevin Pritts, Bret Nash, Ashley Wilson

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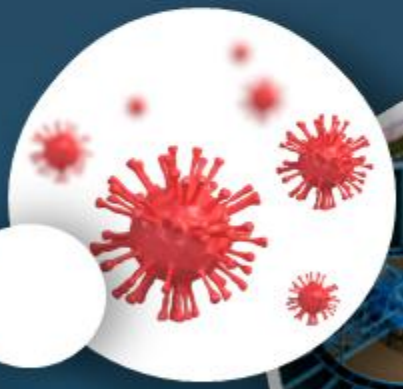

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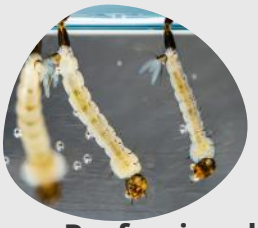

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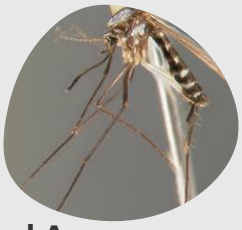

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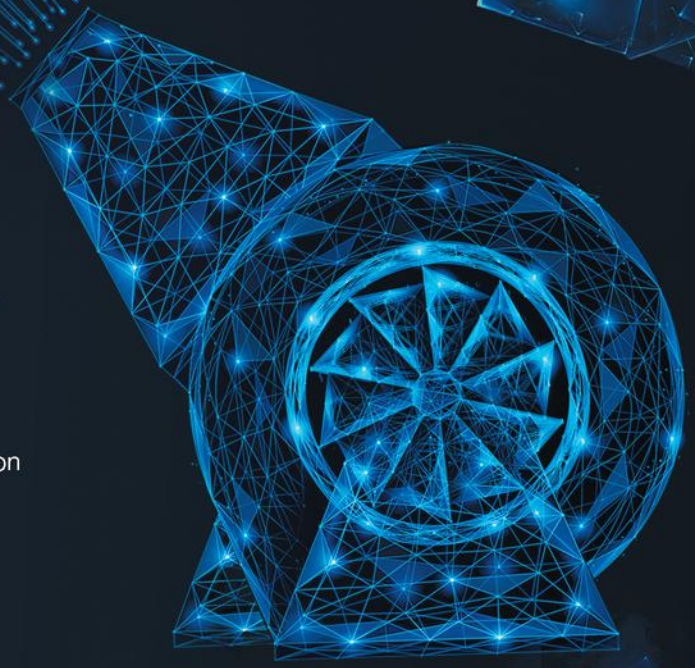

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President's Message

I know this is not a Brag Board, but Texas Mosquito Control Association can certainly brag about our superb Spring meeting! Our San Antonio training event is always a favorite among our ranks and this Spring meeting saw over 100 professionals receiving CEUs. I offer special thanks to our sponsors and their consistent physical and financial presence that improves our member experience.

The 2024 season was tough for most of us. Very tough for some of us. The 2024 West Nile virus human case numbers are still being verified and posted. The number I saw today is more than 275 cases higher than the human case number I saw in December. As of May 1st, last season had 444 total WNV Disease cases with 352 cases of West Nile Neuroinvasive. See for yourself here: : DSHS Reportable Zoonotic Diseases in Texas

Many parts of our state are experiencing budget cuts to vector control programs along with department decisions and City ordinances against fogging – even when West Nile virus is detected. These program cuts and moves away from proven interventions come tightly on the heels of one of the State's most significant West Nile virus seasons. Each of those numbers is a family that has been impacted, sometimes tragically. Our positions demand that we speak out against the program cuts and department decisions that do not align with CDC and AMCA recommendations.

President’s Message Continued

Within five short months, the most eventful parts of the 2025 mosquito season will be behind us and TMCA will be gathering in El Paso for the Fall meeting. We have some changes to the Association Board to vote on, presentations on research, techniques, and tactics different from our own, Young Professionals to influence, and a darn fine Bar B Que Social. I look forward to learning from our peers and visiting with you there.

TMCA has a great new(ish) website that greatly aided the registration process for the Spring meeting and will drive better engagement and attendance for future functions. Please go visit the new website and email a thank you note to the TMCA webmaster Tiffany Walker for all her creative energies and thoughtful design.

Mosquito season has now started for many of us, and we know that the coming months demand our full attention. Our staff members and field teams will spend many hours away from their families and loved ones this summer so that other families may enjoy the summer and be protected from mosquito borne diseases. Enjoy the time you spend with your loved ones and be glad you have them in your life. Stay safe.

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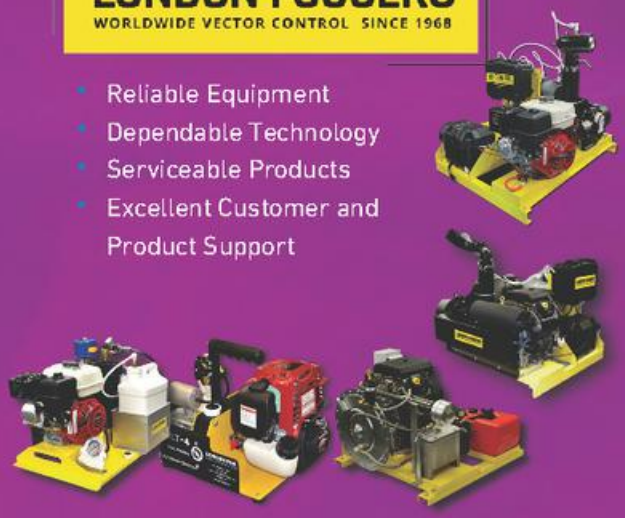

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To be the leader for mosquito and vector control issues in Texas.

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To protect public health and quality of life in Texas by promoting research and best management practices in vector control through collaborative networking and educational opportunities

Legislative Issue TX HB2998

By: Nina Dacko

For those who follow legislation introduced into the Texas House or Senate, you may have noticed TX House Bill 2998 introduced by Representative Lowe from Tarrant County. The aim of this bill was to introduce legislation requiring a vote for “mass applications of pesticides by municipalities or counties”. The Texas Mosquito Control Association (TMCA) monitors for bills of this type that may affect mosquito control operations. If enacted as worded, this would seemingly require a vote for mosquito ULV and other mosquito related pesticide applications as well as general pesticide applications. There is no definition of what exactly “mass pesticide applications” are other than an application made by a “motorized vehicle or other motorized device”. There is also no clarity about how often this vote would need to happen if enacted. There are obvious issues with this bill conflicting with other already implemented laws in the agricultural code, and the health and safety code. TMCA reached out to other affiliates including Texas Pesticide Management Association (TPMA), The American Mosquito Control Association (AMCA), Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), Texas AgriLife and more. As TMCA members we want to ensure you that these types of issue are on our radar. This bill had been introduced in February, and assigned to the Internal Affairs Committee in March. No movement is expected for this bill, but should this be discussed, this would trigger action from the Texas Mosquito Control Association to work with the American Mosquito Control Association to write a letter to each committee member with concerns surrounding this bill and how it could potentially impact mosquito control operations in the state. If there are local issue or local legislation that is being introduced in your area, please feel free to reach out and talk to us about it! Contact Nina Dacko nmdacko@gmail.com for additional information!

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TMCA Hosts Successful Spring Workshop in San Antonio

The Texas Mosquito Control Association held its annual Spring Workshop on April 9, 2025, at the stunning San Antonio Botanical Gardens. The event drew close to 100 participants, all eager to expand their knowledge and earn continuing education credits.

We extend our sincere thanks to our outstanding presenters, who brought valuable insights and expertise to the workshop:

- Ms. Molly Keck, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
- Dr. Bethany Bolling, Texas Department of State Health Services
- Dr. Pete Obenauer, VDCI
- Dr. Jr McMillan, Texas Tech University
- Ms. Elizabeth Prokop, Texas Department of Agriculture

Thank you to everyone who joined us and contributed to making the workshop a great success!

Host Transmission

A Special Thank You to Our Sponsors and Vendors

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all of our sponsors and vendors for their continued support of the Texas Mosquito Control Association. Your generosity and partnership play a vital role in the success of our events, and we are truly grateful for your ongoing commitment to our mission.

Your presence at the Spring Workshop not only added value to the experience for all attendees, but also helped foster important connections and conversations within our industry. We look forward to continuing our collaboration and growing together in the years ahead.

Thank you for all that you do!

With Gratitude to Sonja Swiger

We would also like to give a special thanks to Dr. Sonja Swiger for her incredible dedication and hard work in planning our events. Her commitment, attention to detail, and behind-the-scenes efforts are what help make our workshops run so smoothly and successfully.

We are truly grateful for everything she does—thank you, Sonja!

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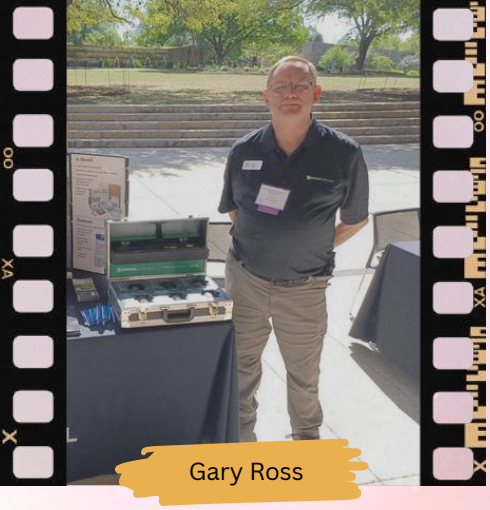
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We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the Gulf South V.E.C.T.O.R. Training Center for co-sponsoring our Spring Workshop. Their support and collaboration were instrumental in making this event possible, and we deeply appreciate their continued partnership in advancing mosquito control education and training.

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Laboratory Note: Identification and description of *Culex salinarius* variant in Fort Bend County mosquitoes

By Jeremy Verde, Kevin Pritts, Bret Nash

Fort Bend County Environmental Health, 4520 Reading Rd STE 800, Rosenberg, TX 77471

Culex salinarius Coquillett is a species of mosquito in the *Culex* genus, commonly found throughout much of the United States, and can be found year-round in Southeast Texas[1-3]. Despite its name, *salinarius,* meaning "of salt," immatures inhabit freshwater, with the ideal habitat being the freshwater areas around salt marshes[1]. This makes Fort Bend County an ideal environment, given its proximity to salt marshes and low-lying areas. Adult mosquitoes are medium-sized and feature brown coloration. The body is often covered in fine pale bronze scales. A fine pale bronze colored stripe can be seen along the basal, and occasionally apical, area of the abdominal tergites, and abdominal segments 7and 8 are mostly covered with fine pale bronze-colored scales[1-3] (Figure 1 and 2).

A previously undescribed variant has recently been collected on multiple occasions and locations across the Fort Bend County from CDC miniature light traps baited with CO_2. The variant was first identified in Fort Bend County on January 13th, 2025, in a suburban neighborhood. Additional collections of this variant occurred throughout the month of February in both suburban and exurb areas. These specimens are displaying the same general markings and morphological traits typical of the species as described above; however, this new variant is distinguished by the presence of distinct dots of scales centered parasagittal along the abdominal tergites (Figure 1). These scales appear as small, evenly spaced dots that form a linear pattern along both sides of the abdominal tergites, giving it a unique visual signature, compared to the typical *Culex salinarius*. Despite these distinct scale markings, the mosquito maintains the same size, shape, and abdominal pattern of *Culex salinarius* as previously described in Darsie and Ward 2006, suggesting that this variant may be a result of genetic variation or environmental influences that have altered its appearance. A collection from 2/4/2025 contained both *Culex salinarius* types as described above. This would suggest that this new trait does not appear to impact the species' general behavior or habitat preferences, which remain consistent with the known *Culex salinarius* populations. Further work is needed to determine the extent of the variation and to determine differences among the *Culex salinarius* populations.

The distinct parasagittal pattern of dots on the abdomen represents a notable morphological variation. We would like to acknowledge that this variant was first collected in a mosquito control district in the Florida panhandle in 2019, and more recently, it has been identified in trap collections from Louisiana in 2024. This marks the first time this variant has been collected in Texas. To our knowledge, no formal description or publication has been made regarding this variant.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank the Mosquito Control Team at Fort Bend County Environmental Health for their work in setting up and collecting these traps. We would also like to thank Fort Bend County Health and Human Services Leadership for their support of the work and for publishing this description.

References

1. Walter Reed Biosystematics Unit (2021). *Culex salinarius* species page. Walter Reed Biosystematics Unit Website, http://wrbu.si.edu/vectorspecies/mosquitoes/salinarius, accessed on 25 February 2025.

2. Carpenter, Stanley J, and Walter J LaCasse. (1955) "Genus *Culex* Linnaeus." *Mosquitos of North America*, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, California, 1974, pp. 290–292. California Library Reprint Series.

3. Darsie, R.F., Jr., & Ward, R.A. (2005). "Key to the Adult Females of Genus Culex" Identification and geographical distribution of the mosquitoes of North America, north of Mexico. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, pp.79.

Figure 1: *Culex salinarius* variant with pale Parasagittal dots on the abdominal tergites.

Figure 2: *Culex salinarius* with more typically described phenotypic traits.

NOTE: If you are seeing this variant in your collections, please contact Jeremy or Kevin at 346-840-0825. They would like to see where it is distributed in Texas and follow up on any observed changes to its biology.

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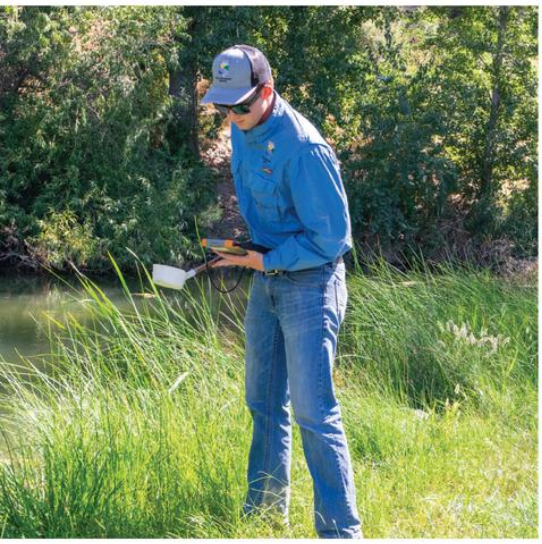

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Sentinel Chicken Program at Galveston County Mosquito Control District

By: Ashley Wilson

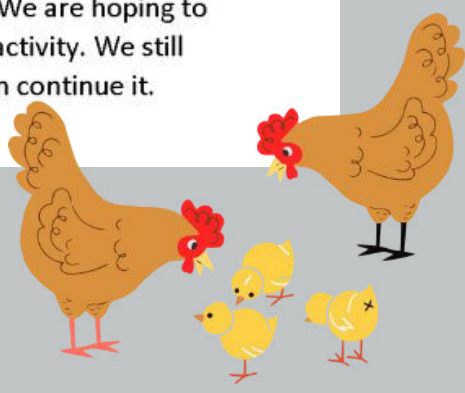
Galveston County's sentinel chicken program was established in the late 1980's with a goal of monitoring SLE, WE, EEE and later WNV. Samples were originally sent to the TDSHS for testing but in 2002 Dr. Bob Tesh at UTMB Galveston took over the testing.

The day-old chicks are shipped by priority mail to the local feed store where we collect and bring them home to our office until mid-March. Our baby chicks arrived this year in mid-January, right before the snow storm on January 21st. Our crew members made trips back and forth twice a day through the winter weather to make sure they had food and water. The first week is always the most crucial. In mid-March the chickens were moved to their new home with Galveston County residents. We have a total of 6 chicken locations throughout the county with residents with pre-existing chicken populations. Each location gets 5 chickens. We provide them with feed through the whole testing process and the chickens are theirs to keep after October, when we complete our last round of testing.

Blood samples are collected from the chicken's wings with 21G 3ml syringes. The samples are placed in a centrifuge and the serum is separated and removed for the submitted samples. The serum is taken to UTMB Galveston where they perform an Hemagglutination inhibition (HI Assay). This test is used to detect the antibodies present in the sera to determine which viruses the chickens have been exposed to. Certain viruses, when mixed with red blood cells, cause hemagglutination. When antibodies specific to virus are present, they neutralize the virus and inhibit hemagglutination. Chickens are great for testing because the exposure to the virus doesn't normally kill them. We can also continue to use the chickens for testing for the rest of the season. We have seen a chicken contract EEE at the beginning of the season and then WNV at the end of the season. With a smaller department it is also easier to test a smaller group of birds then trying to go out and catch birds for testing.

Last year's testing concluded with 15 WNV positives and one SLE positive. We feel that the Sentinel Chicken program is an essential tool in our arbovirus detection. In 2021 it helped alert us to SLE activity in one of our cities. From there we increased our trapping locations and continued to detect SLE in mosquito pools. We adjusted treatments as needed until our SLE positive pools dropped. The program has also been helpful in monitoring EEE since efforts in isolating EEE in mosquito pools has been unsuccessful. Increased positives in sentinel chickens often corresponds to increased positive mosquito pools or human cases.

Outside monitoring diseases within the community, the sentinel chicken program is great tool in community outreach and shows that we have many tools in arsenal outside of spraying. Plus, the community always gets a kick out of mosquito control "raising" chickens. As we prepared for our first sample of the season this month, we learned that UTMB would not be able to test for us this year. This is due to a shift in the NIH and the uncertainty of some of UTMB funding and programs. Currently we are in a standstill as we explore other options for testing our chickens for the season. We are hoping to reach a solution within the next month before we enter the peak season for viral activity. We still believe there is a great future in the sentinel chicken program and we hope we can continue it.



Ashley Wilson, entomologist and Program Coordinator for Galveston County, taking a sample from the wing of a sentinel chicken

Chicks hanging out at the Galveston County Mosquito Control District until they are big enough to be placed in their new home with county residents.

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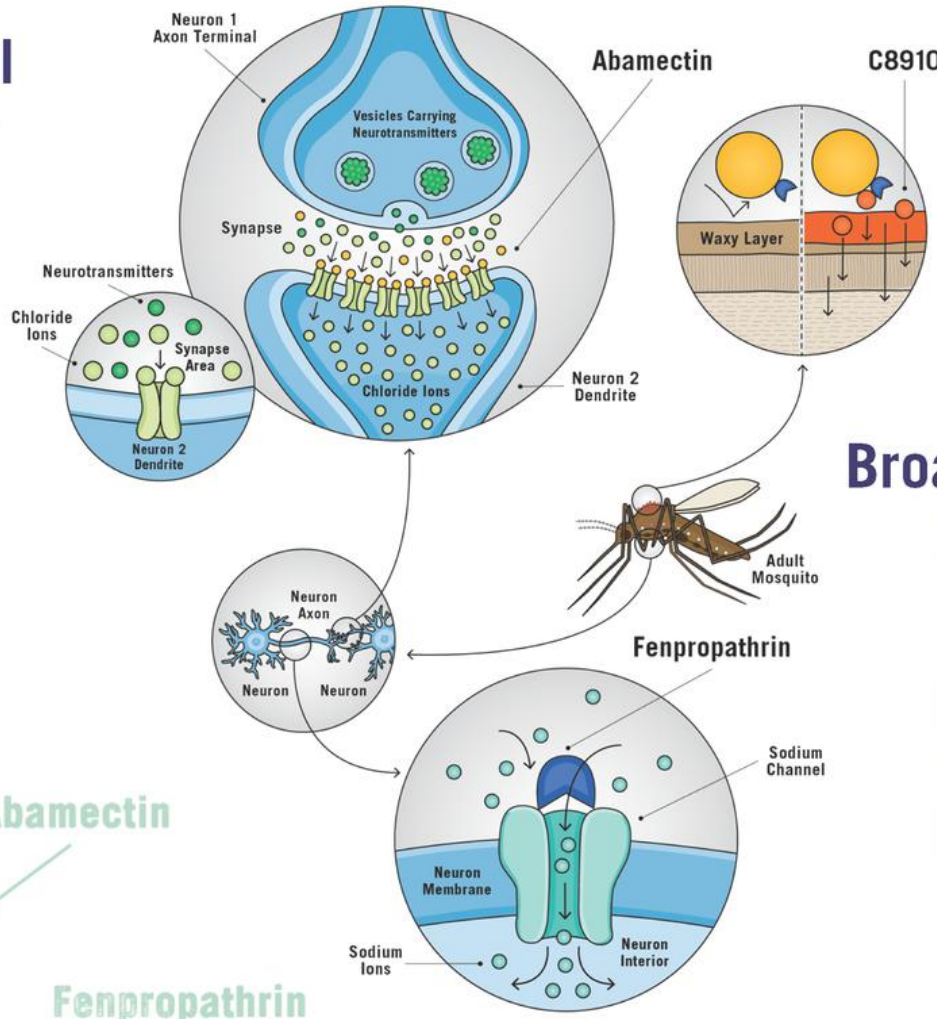
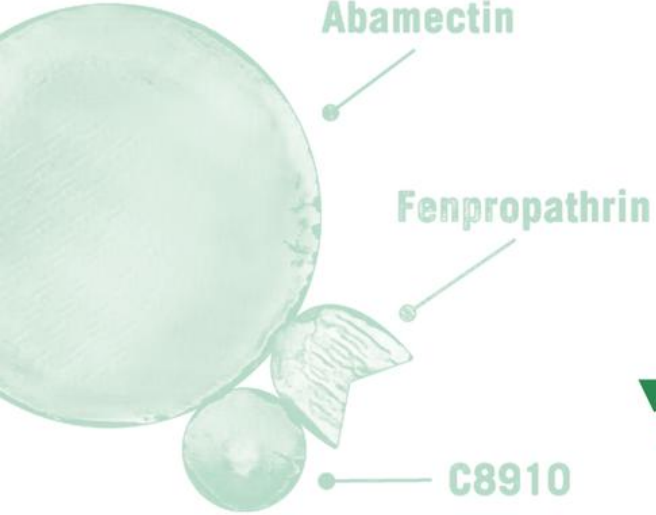
Strategically Address Emerging Public Health Threats

Operational Flexibility



Broad Spectrum Efficacy



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2025 DSHS Arbovirus Activity Report
Week #17 (ending April 26, 2025)
Report Date: April 29, 2025

Table 1. 2025 Arbovirus Activity Summary, Texas, Week 17

Arbovirus	Mosquito Pools	Avian	Veterinary	Sentinel Chicken	Human					
					Febrile Illness	Neurologic Illness	Severe Dengue	TOTAL (HUMAN)	Deaths	PVD[2]
California Serogroup[1]								0		
Chikungunya								0		
Dengue								0		
Eastern Equine Encephalitis								0		
St. Louis Encephalitis								0		
West Nile								0		1
Zika								0		
TOTAL REPORTS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

[1]California Serogroup includes California encephalitis, Jamestown Canyon, Keystone, La Crosse, snowshoe hare, and trivittatus viruses.
[2]PVD - Presumptive viremic blood donors are people who had no symptoms at the time of donating blood through a blood collection agency, but whose blood tested positive when screened for the presence of West Nile virus or Zika virus. Unless they meet the case reporting criteria, they are not counted as a case for official reporting purposes and are not included in the "Total (HUMAN)" column.

Note: Human mortality from arboviral conditions is aggregated and reported monthly once documentation has been received and verified.

For more detailed information about West Nile virus, including past weekly and annual reports, please visit https://www.dshs.texas.gov/mosquito-borne-diseases/dshs-arbovirus-weekly-activity-reports

For more detailed information about Zika, please visit http://www.texaszika.org/

Please note that arbovirus weekly reports are weekly snapshots of preliminary DSHS data and may change at any time due to quality assurance procedures. The final weekly report of each year is not complete data for the year and should not be used to draw conclusions regarding annual activity. Refer to our annual summary reports for finalized, complete data or contact wnv@dshs.texas.gov to request additional data or with any questions.