

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 239
By: Powell
Public Health
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Texas has had nearly 300 declared disasters since 1996. Some of these disasters have strained infrastructure and have left people stranded in crowded shelters, often without access to proper hygiene or adequate information about access to health care. It has been noted that the close confinement during these disasters increases the transmission of communicable diseases, while the disaster itself derails normal vaccination schedules and delays routine health care check-ups. The risk of COVID-19 transmission in crowded environments highlights the need for rapid access to immunization information during a disaster. Even as vaccines became available late last year, there were still many obstacles to the timely dissemination of clear and consistent information.

It has been suggested that the state should establish plans that not only ensure recovery from this pandemic but that also establish plans for communicating information regarding disease prevention during future disasters. S.B. 239 seeks to address this issue by requiring the Department of State Health Services, using existing resources, to develop and implement a disease prevention information system for dissemination of immunization information during a declared state of disaster or local state of disaster.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

S.B. 239 amends the Government Code to require the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), using existing resources and not later than August 31, 2022, to develop and implement a disease prevention information system for dissemination of immunization information during a declared state of disaster or local state of disaster. The bill requires DSHS, during a declared state of disaster or local state of disaster, to ensure that educational materials regarding immunizations are available to local health authorities in Texas for distribution to the following:

- public and private schools;
- child-care facilities as defined by reference to the Human Resources Code;
- community centers offering youth services and programs;
- community centers offering services and programs to vulnerable populations, including communities of color, low-income individuals, and elderly individuals;
- local health care providers; and
- veterans homes, as defined by reference to the Natural Resources Code.

The bill requires the educational materials to include the most recent immunization schedules by age as recommended by the CDC and locations, if any, of local health care providers that offer immunizations.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2021.