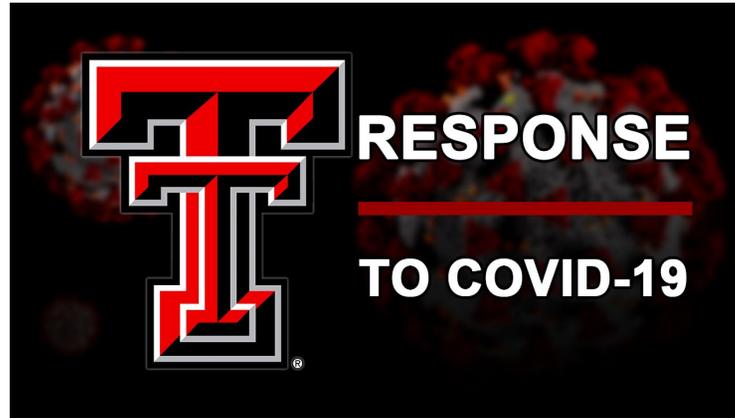


TTU laboratory awarded \$2.23 million for efforts to combat COVID-19



(Nexstar Media Group/EverythingLubbock.com Staff)

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This is a news release from Texas Tech University.

[Texas Tech University](#)'s Biological Threat Research Laboratory (BTRL) was the first lab in the state of Texas to begin testing for COVID-19 in February. In the five months since, it has tested more than 9,500 samples from across a 67-county region.

[Steve Presley](#), director of both the BTRL and [The Institute of Environmental and Human Health](#) (TIEHH) in which it's located, said the lab won't be slowing its activities to combat the coronavirus anytime soon.

Presley and his team have several proposed vaccine-development projects in the works. And the lab has now been granted \$2.23 million from the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to continue its COVID-19-related activities through April 1, 2022.

As a member of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) and DSHS' [Laboratory Response Network](#), the BTRL's expertise and technical diagnostic capabilities are available to provide support to city and county public health agencies and other health care providers within a region covering about 66,000 square miles – from the northern border of the Panhandle south to the San Angelo area.

In addition to testing samples, the BTRL also provides the region's public health departments, hospitals and clinics with the viral transport medium they need to safely package and transport samples to the BTRL for testing.

Presley specified that the BTRL is not involved with surveillance testing, like that offered through drive-thru testing locations.

“Because we’re part of the CDC’s Laboratory Response Network, our mission is to test critically ill patients and hospital inpatient individuals who are suspected of having COVID-19,” Presley said, “but we also test health care workers and emergency responders who have a confirmed exposure to COVID-19.”

That said, the lab has plenty of room to increase testing. That’s due, in large part, to a collaborative partnership between Texas Tech and the [Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center \(TTUHSC\)](#), which established the [Texas Tech/TTUHSC COVID-19 Testing Team](#) early in the pandemic to increase how many tests could be done each day.

“We’re not yet even close to our full capacity,” Presley said. “We can significantly increase the number we’re doing daily.”

Most importantly, they can do so safely – their record speaks for itself.

“We’ve been operating at least 16 hours a day, seven days a week, for 130 days,” Presley said. “That is 2,080 hours – roughly 12,500 person-hours –without any of the testing crew becoming positive for COVID-19 or having any laboratory safety issues.”

In addition to team members involved in the hands-on testing, Presley credits the administrative staff members who volunteered to continue working –doing the paperwork, facility maintenance and other often-thankless tasks – as well as university administrators who provided support.

“Texas Tech University is very proud of the hard work and dedication of the staff, volunteers and leadership team of our institutional testing laboratory,” said [Joseph A. Heppert](#), Texas Tech vice president for [research and innovation](#). “These individuals have enabled this CDC-affiliated laboratory to provide high-quality test results for patients showing COVID-19 symptoms throughout the West Texas region. We are extremely grateful to the Texas Department of State Health Services for this financial support, which will allow us to continue serving the citizens of the state throughout this crisis.”

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