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**Status Update on MDPH Efforts to Investigate Reports of
Neurological Vocal Tics and Other Vocal Symptoms Reported
Among Students Attending
Essex Agricultural and Technical High School and
North Shore Technical High School**

February 5, 2013

The purpose of this summary is to provide a status report on an investigation of acquired vocal disorders such as neurological vocal tics and repetitive hiccups among students who attend either Essex Agricultural and Technical High School or North Shore Technical High School, located in Danvers and Middleton, MA, respectively. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Environmental Health (MDPH/BEH) has received reports of a number of students (approximately one to two dozen) that have presented with these symptoms. For that reason, MDPH/BEH is undertaking an investigation to work with attending physicians to identify and confirm the number of children who have been diagnosed with neurological vocal tics or other vocal disorders and provide a review of their medical records to identify any common factors (environmental or non-environmental) that may have contributed to the development of these conditions. MDPH met with school and town officials in late December to learn more about the situation and has also been contacted directly by several school parents expressing their concerns.

MDPH has been working with information from the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine (BORIM) to identify medical providers in the more than 50 communities where students who attend one of these schools may live. This information will be used to develop a comprehensive list of physicians and specialists for MDPH to reach out to. MDPH will provide these physicians with a consent form and request that physicians discuss our investigation with the parents of any of their patients who attend one of these schools and are exhibiting vocal tics or other vocal symptoms. Those parents that are willing to have their child be included in the MDPH investigation should discuss participation with their child's physician(s) who can provide them with a consent form. Signed parental consent allows MDPH/BEH to legally obtain their

child's medical records (MDPH will also provide a consent form directly to parents who contact our office with these specific concerns about their child, upon request).

Once MDPH/BEH receives signed consent forms, department staff will begin contacting the child's medical providers listed on each child's form to request copies of their medical records. When the medical records are received at our offices, the MDPH/BEH Medical Officer, Dr. Jonathan Burstein, will begin conducting his review. Information contained in medical records will be used to 1) determine the likelihood that symptoms/diagnoses are related, and 2) identify any common factors that may have contributed to the development of vocal tics or vocal disorders among these children. Thus, it will be important for MDPH/BEH to obtain complete medical records for each child who's parent has provided consent to participate before the medical records review can be completed.

Concurrent with efforts to better understand the prevalence of vocal tics or other vocal disorders, the MDPH/BEH Indoor Air Quality Program will also be conducting indoor environmental investigations at both schools. These investigations will involve indoor air testing and visual observations in all areas of the schools, beginning the week of February 11th.

We understand that the recent increased attention on this situation may have raised additional concerns about vocal tics and other vocal disorders being reported in these children and we hope this status update helps to clarify the steps that MDPH is taking with regard to this investigation. If any parent has questions or concerns, they can contact Meg Blanchet, Assistant Director of the MDPH/BEH Environmental Toxicology Program at 617 624-5757.