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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**

August 1, 2013

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Environmental Health, (MDPH/BEH) would like to provide local health and school officials as well as interested parents with a brief update on recent activities related to our efforts to investigate reports of acquired vocal disorders such as neurological vocal tics and repetitive hiccups among some students at either Essex Agricultural and Technical High School or North Shore Technical High School, located in Danvers and Middleton, MA, respectively.

Since January 2013, MDPH has been working with the Board of Registration in Medicine (BORIM) to inform area physicians about the MDPH investigation. MDPH has provided medical records consent forms to physicians and requested their assistance in identifying patients they have treated with an acquired vocal disorder who attend one of these two schools. Outreach to over 2600 attending physicians was conducted in March 2013 and follow-up outreach was conducted to the physicians in May 2013. In addition, MDPH has provided medical records consent forms directly to school parents at the February 2013 meeting and in response to individual requests in subsequent months. As reported in our last written update in May 2013, MDPH has received signed medical records consent forms for nine students who have been reported as having vocal tics or chronic hiccups. Although some additional consent forms were

received since our last update, these were consent forms for additional medical providers for students who were already included in the MDPH medical records review. Dr. Jon Burstein, BEH Medical Officer, is currently conducting his review of the medical records received by MDPH to date. While all medical records requests have been sent to providers, a few additional records have yet to be received by MDPH. These pending records will be included in the medical records review after they are received. As described in our previous updates, information contained in the medical records will be used to 1) determine whether the symptoms/diagnoses could possibly be related, and 2) identify any potential common factors (environmental or non-environmental) that may have contributed to the development of vocal tics or vocal disorders among these children. If any commonalities among the students are identified through the medical records review, then MDPH will evaluate appropriate next steps.

The MDPH/BEH Indoor Air Quality Program (IAQ) has conducted indoor air assessments at both Essex Agricultural and Technical High School and North Shore Technical High School. Based on visual observations and air testing conducted during the building investigations at these schools, no significant environmental factors that would be most likely to impact neurological effects have been identified based upon a review of the scientific literature. MDPH also collected two water samples at North Shore Technical High School in June in response to specific concerns raised at the 2013 meeting with parents relative to water consumed by students during athletic practices being a possible common factor for some students with vocal tics and chronic hiccups. Water samples were collected from a large team water bottle and directly from the supply tap where the team water bottles are filled. No drinking water contaminants were detected in either sample. These and other findings of the IAQ investigations are being summarized in several reports. The first IAQ report summarizing investigations of five buildings at Essex Agricultural and Technical High school has been finalized and is available on the MDPH/BEH website at www.mass.gov/dph/iaq. This is the school most frequently used by the high school students involved in this investigation. Anyone who is interested in having a copy of this first IAQ report sent to them by mail should contact the MDPH/BEH IAQ Program at 617 624 5757. Reports summarizing the remaining IAQ investigations conducted at the other buildings at Essex Agricultural and Technical High School and conducted at North Shore Technical High School will be forthcoming.

We hope everyone is having a nice summer. If any parent of a student who attends either of these schools has questions or concerns regarding these ongoing investigation efforts, they should feel free to contact Meg Blanchet, Assistant Director of the MDPH/BEH Environmental Toxicology Program at 617 624-5757.