



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
Bureau of Environmental Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619
Phone: 617-624-5757 Fax: 617-624-5777
TTY: 617-624-5286

DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
SECRETARY

JOHN AUERBACH
COMMISSIONER

To: Interested Members of the New Bedford Community
From: Massachusetts Department of Public Health/Bureau of Environmental Health
Subject: Status Update on Activities Related to New Bedford High School, Keith Middle School, and Surrounding Neighborhood
Date: September 11, 2008

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on ongoing activities of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Bureau of Environmental Health (MDPH/BEH) related to the New Bedford High School, Keith Middle School, and surrounding neighborhood.

Serum PCB Blood Testing

Since June of this year, MDPH/BEH's contractor (John Snow Institute, Inc.) completed interviews with 117 individuals who expressed interest in having their blood tested for PCBs. A questionnaire was administered to each individual to assess their potential for exposure to PCBs either because of employment or attendance at either New Bedford High School or the Keith Middle School, or because of living in the neighborhood around the schools. Because fewer individuals requested interviews than expected, MDPH will be able to offer serum PCB blood testing to all those interviewed but as part of two separate groups. Some individuals will be offered blood testing because of their affiliation with the schools or neighborhood and a higher potential for exposure to PCBs, while others with a lower potential for exposure to PCBs will be offered blood testing as a community service. MDPH anticipates sending letters within the next few weeks to all those who participated with a schedule and location for blood testing as well as a consent form to be signed and returned before the blood test. Once MDPH receives the signed consent form back, MDPH will call each participant to schedule an appointment for their blood draw.

Blood serum samples will be analyzed for PCBs by the MDPH State Laboratory in Jamaica Plain. The State Laboratory has reported that they expect the analyses to take place over the next several months. Once all laboratory analyses have been completed, individuals will receive a confidential letter with their blood test results. A report summarizing the findings of the blood tests will also be prepared by BEH; to protect participants' confidentiality, no individual results with identifying information will be released to the public. Only summary statistics will be provided.

Indoor Air Quality Evaluation of the New Bedford High School

In June of this year, staff from the BEH Indoor Air Quality Program conducted a site visit at the New Bedford High School to evaluate the quality of the indoor air. This evaluation included factors related to adequate ventilation, such as carbon dioxide levels, humidity, temperature, and moisture/mold problems. It did not include testing for PCBs in the indoor air; the City of New Bedford's contractor has been testing for PCBs in the school and reporting regularly to the community on their findings. BEH will review the indoor environmental testing done by the city's contractor in relation to the results of the BEH/IAQ Program evaluation, as part of an overall indoor air evaluation. In addition, staff from the BEH Community Assessment Program met with school staff during the site visit to discuss any health concerns they may have that are potentially related to the school's air quality. The IAQ Program will prepare a report on the findings of its site visit and will provide it to all interested parties when it is completed.

Neighborhood Cancer Incidence Evaluation

The BEH Community Assessment Program is in the process of evaluating cancer incidence data collected by the Massachusetts Cancer Registry for the five census tracts in New Bedford in closest proximity to the High School and the Keith Middle School. Citywide cancer rates will also be provided. Cancer incidence data are being evaluated for the 23-year time period 1982 through 2004 (the most current, complete year of statewide cancer incidence data at the time this analysis began). MDPH anticipates releasing its report containing these cancer incidence data in the late spring.

If you have any questions about this memo, please call the Bureau of Environmental Health at (617) 624-5757.