

Board of Health Programs: A Five Year Summary

Over the past five years and including the time during which the current health assessment took place, the Board of Health worked to strengthen its core public health program and create a foundation to meet future needs of the community. Steps toward this goal, in addition to the health assessment itself, include the following:

Revision of Local Regulations. As of 1997, local health regulations had not been revised since 1953. At the beginning of 2002, all local regulations had been completely revised, with many new regulations added to protect community health and well-being.

Improved Public Health Nursing Program. Public health nurses play a critical role in infectious disease prevention, monitoring and control, and may contribute to the prevention of chronic diseases through screening and counseling. The creation of a staff position with the Board of Health in 1998 resulted in increased contact with local healthcare providers, improved health screening services, and more vaccinations and preventative services for residents. Reinforcement of the position also strengthened the Town's capacity to respond to a pandemic disease outbreak, to a bioterrorist attack or other emergency event.

Health Screening. The Board promoted greater accessibility to health screening services for residents in an effort to prevent the morbidity and mortality of specific widespread diseases. Blood pressure testing for all residents is now available through the Health Department. Screening for susceptibility to Type 2 Diabetes will be available as of November 2002. Tuberculosis testing is available to residents at high risk for the disease.

Increased Vaccination Coverage. The Board advanced vaccination of at-risk groups and expanded clinical testing for diseases, including: 1) Hepatitis B vaccinations for adolescents; 2) influenza vaccinations for seniors, residents 50 years of age and older, and the chronically ill; 3) Hepatitis B for first responders; 4) pneumococcal disease vaccinations for seniors. Tetanus vaccines may also be obtained from the Public Health Nurse.

Enhanced Environmental Protection: To protect the local environment and protect community health, the Board of Health has initiated or participated in the following programs:

- **Minuteman Household Hazardous Waste Facility:** The Board contributed to the development and operation of the facility that provides the community with better, ongoing access for hazardous materials disposal than the single day event of years past.
- **Toxics Use Reduction Programs:** The Board of Health has received two separate grants from the Toxics Use Reduction Institute to reduce toxics usage in the community. The first program addressed toxics usage by residents and small

businesses through a communications program. The second program focused on reducing toxics usage by restaurants and other food establishments, local schools, and the municipality.

- Pesticide Reduction Program: Letters were sent to residents as part of a campaign to discourage use of pesticides and herbicides for landscaping, which may harm the watershed.
- Surface water testing: Extensive testing has been carried out on the Old Reservoir, Vine Brook and other areas to assess pollution levels and ensure the safety of recreation areas.

Influenza Pandemic, Bioterrorism, and Natural Disaster Planning. In 2000, the Board of Health set emergency planning as a goal. Emergency planning continues in order to prepare for natural disasters, bioterrorism events, and to address the probable threat of an influenza pandemic.

Improved Food Safety. Enforcement of changes to the State food safety code in 2001, increased training offered to establishment by Health Department staff, and increased inspection levels have improved the safety of food establishments in Lexington. Goals for improved food safety were based on the high number of susceptible seniors and young children in the town and the many visitors who patronize local restaurants.

Increased Collaboration with School System. The Board of Health worked with the school system to implement a Hepatitis B vaccination program for middle and high school students, to address problems with lead in the water at certain school buildings, and to identify indoor air quality problems.

Meeting the Health Assessment Priorities: Board of Health Focus for the Future

The Board of Health will continue to strengthen core programs in the future while integrating the key issues generated by the health assessment into its planning process. As a beginning, the Board voted to address obesity and related chronic diseases as a focus for the upcoming year. However, the many other issues cited in the evaluation will also be addressed in the future either through the efforts of the Board, or through collaboration with or support of other Town agencies.