

Harvard School of Public Health
NIEHS Center for Environmental Health

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Community Forum on Asthma and Clean Air Scheduled for March 28 in Dorchester

BOSTON, MA— On Wednesday, March 28, 2012, *Change in the Air* – a Community Forum on Asthma in our Neighborhoods and Clean Air for Everyone in Boston – will take place at Dorchester House Multi-Service Center, 1353 Dorchester Avenue (near Fields Corner), from 6:15 to 7:30 p.m. One of the nation's top environmental health scientists from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) and state and local health and environmental officials will engage the people of Dorchester and surrounding neighborhoods in a community dialogue about asthma and clean air.

This Community Forum is part of a national meeting of the NIEHS Centers for Environmental Health Sciences, hosted this year by Harvard School of Public Health's NIEHS Center for Environmental Health. Linda Birnbaum, PhD, Director of NIEHS, and one of the nation's top environmental health authorities, will head up the panel.

Since becoming NIEHS Director in January 2009, Dr. Birnbaum has emphasized that collaboration between research centers and communities must be an integral component of the mission of NIEHS.

The panel will include John (Jack) Spengler, Akira Yamaguchi Professor of Environmental Health and Human Habitation at HSPH, who has conducted several NIEHS-funded studies in the Dorchester area; Jean Zotter, Director of the Asthma Prevention and Control Program at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health; and Jim Hunt from the City of Boston Environmental and Energy Services Cabinet. Joel Abrams, President and CEO of Dorchester House, will welcome the gathering; other community and agency representatives will serve on the panel. Jalal Ghaemghami, formerly of the Mayor's Green Building Task Force and now of Great Partners, Inc., will moderate the discussion.

The burden of asthma

The *Health of Boston 2011* report by the Boston Public Health Commission showed that the burden of asthma is not shared evenly across all parts of the city. Between 2008 and 2010, only 4% of adults living in Fenway and 6% of adults living in Allston/Brighton reported having asthma. However, rates were much higher in Roxbury and North Dorchester, where 15% and 17% of adults, respectively, reported they had asthma. In other words, one out of every six to seven adults living in these neighborhoods currently suffers from asthma.

The program offers residents of Dorchester and neighboring communities a chance to discuss concerns about air quality and the environment and to identify challenges and suggest solutions. Where there are income and health disparities (such as high asthma rates), community concerns often include access to health care and other public services, public transportation, nutrition, and social stress. With asthma rates on the rise nationally, as reported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, communities are continually challenged to find solutions and funding to undertake those challenges.

Diverse language translations will be available as needed during the forum. Dorchester House is handicapped accessible and located close to the Fields Corner MBTA Red Line stop. Admission is free, and no prior reservation is required. However, seating will be on a first come, first served basis. Light refreshments will be available.

Community Forum: *Change in the Air*, Wednesday, March 28, 2012, Dorchester House Multi-Service Community Center, 1353 Dorchester Avenue, Boston. Doors open at 5:30 p.m.; panel and dialogue 6:15 to 7:35 p.m. For more information, telephone 617-288-3230. Sponsored by the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences and the HSPH-NIEHS Center for Environmental Health.

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For more information about NIEHS-sponsored community forums, please visit: <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/about/community/communityforums/>

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