GLOSSARY for Special Needs Disabilities & Medical Terminology
Maryland EMSC Program:
Children with Special Health Care Needs Project

abduction – to move an extremity away from a position near the middle of the body
achondroplasia – failure of normal development of cartilage resulting in dwarfism
adduct – to move an extremity toward or past the middle of the body
apnea – a noticeable pause in the breathing pattern; absence or cessation of breathing for more than 20 seconds
asthma – a respiratory disease causing narrowing of the lower airway passages
atrophy – decreasing in size or wasting away

bradycardia – relatively slow rate of heart contractions
bronchopulmonary dysplasia – abnormal development or alterations in the size, shape, and organization of cells within the lungs and their air passages that decreases the function of gas exchange
cancer – malignant diseases that can affect any one of the body systems
cerebral palsy (CP) – persisting qualitative motor disorder that appears before the age of 3 and is caused by non-progressive damage to the brain
congenital heart disease - many different cardiac anomalies that can be cyanotic or acyanotic
cystic fibrosis – inherited disease causing abnormal secretion of thick mucous in the bronchi and digestive disorders
developmental delay – slower than normal rate of acquisition of developmental skills
developmental disability - limited strength or alertness as a result of chronic or acute health problems.
diabetes – endocrine disorder in which the body does not produce enough insulin (Type I and Type II)
dysplasia of the hip (DDH) – describes hip bone slipping in and out of the hip socket

extend - to straighten
flex – to bend
fracture - a break or rupture

hemiplegia – paralysis of half of the body
hemophilia – a blood disorder that prevents blood from clotting
HIV/ AIDS – acquired immunodeficiency syndrome caused by the human immunodeficiency virus
hydrocephalus – excessive build up of cerebral spinal fluid within the cavities of the brain (ventricles)

low birth weight (LBW) – less than 2500 grams at birth

muscular dystrophy (MD) – a disease characterized by weakness and atrophy of muscle without involvement of the nervous system

neuromuscular disorder- disorders of muscle or muscle innervation

osteogenesis imperfecta (OI) – genetic disorder of the skeletal system, characterized by brittle bones that are easily fractured. Also referred to as “brittle bone disease”.

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**Paresis** – weakness

**Paralysis (plegia)** – complete or partial loss of function

**Paraparesis** – weakness affecting lower extremities

**Paraplegia** – paralysis of both lower extremities and the lower trunk

**Pierre Robin Sequence** – congenital defect of the face, characterized by abnormal smallness of the jaw & tongue with obstruction of the airway, absence of gag reflex

**Premature or Preterm Infant** – less than 37 weeks gestational age at birth

**Prone** – lying face down

**Pulmonary** – pertaining to the lungs

**Quadriplegia** – paralysis of all four limbs and most of the trunk, may or may not affect breathing depending upon the level of spinal cord involvement

**Reflex** – regurgitation

**Rigidity** – stiffness or inflexibility

**Scoliosis** – lateral curvature of the spine

**Seizure Disorder** – a condition in which an abnormal electrical discharge of the brain cells, often resulting in muscle contractions

**Sickle Cell Disease** – disorder of red blood cells causing changes in oxygen carrying capacity due to the abnormal hemoglobin S

**Spasticity** – increased muscle tone with exaggeration of the tendon reflexes

**Spina Bifida (Myelomeningocele)** – developmental abnormality characterized by defective closure of the bony encasement of the spinal cord with different levels of neuromotor disabilities

**Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)** – injury involving the spinal cord, can be complete or incomplete and can occur anywhere along the spinal column

**Supine** – lying face upward

**Tone** – firmness of tissue or muscle

**Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)** – injury sustained to one or more lobes of the brain that can result in temporary or permanent disability affecting thought, emotions, speech, motor function

**Tracheostomy** – a surgical opening into the windpipe/trachea through the neck to allow passage of air