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