



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## Groundbreaking Ceremony Held for New Health Department Laboratory

*Building located next to UVM research facility, following national trend*

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A groundbreaking ceremony was held today at the Colchester Business and Technology Park for a state-of-the-art new laboratory for the Vermont Department of Health.

The 47,844 square foot building, which will replace the Health Department's 32,695 square foot current laboratory, located on Colchester Ave. in Burlington, will be completed in the summer of 2014.

The current lab, which is 60 years old, must be replaced because it has outgrown its space and the structure is outdated. Planning for the new facility has been in process for more than 10 years. The new lab is designed, in part, to facilitate collaboration between university researchers and public health scientists.

The state health lab routinely performs a wide range of analyses to detect biological, toxicological, chemical and radiological threats to the health of the population – from testing for blood lead levels, rabies, pertussis and salmonella to drinking water contaminants, toxic contaminants, and to support disease outbreak investigations.

The lab also has capabilities to respond rapidly to public health emergencies such as novel strains of flu, suspicious substances containing anthrax or ricin, and unusual events like the tritium leak at Vermont Yankee or widespread flooding after Tropical Storm Irene. More than 50,000 tests are performed at the facility every year.

"This is a great new facility that will serve the state well," said Governor Peter Shumlin. "And the collaboration between the Health Department and UVM scientists will advance public health, medical research, health care and policy in the healthiest state."

"This is a great day for public health," said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD.

"The lab is a cornerstone of our ability to protect and promote the health of Vermonters. The new facility will give our professionals the modern scientific environment and space for the new technologies that are essential to support the daily work of disease investigation and environmental testing and monitoring."

"I'm proud of the part UVM is playing in helping create a state-of-the-art public health facility for Vermont," said Tom Sullivan, UVM president. "This critically important facility is an example of what can happen when the university and the state partner to achieve common goals."

### **State health lab one of oldest in country**

The state health lab dates back to 1898, when the Vermont State Laboratory of Hygiene was established by the Legislature, just the third of its kind to be organized in the U.S. The Health Department's current lab facility is now one of the oldest in the country. Built in 1952, it originally housed administrative offices as well as the lab. The building was renovated in 1985 to serve exclusively as a lab, but the renovations did not replace the antiquated heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems. There is also no additional space for new instrumentation.

Because of these limitations, it has become increasingly difficult to adapt the current facility to accommodate changing scientific technology that requires special facility design, such as safe specimen receipt/processing areas, “clean room” areas for preparing specimens for testing by molecular biology or low level contaminant chemistry procedures, and temperature/humidity and controls.

### **Co-located labs will bring tangible benefits**

The new building was designed collaboratively by the Health Department and UVM to maximize the advantages of having the two buildings in close proximity. The new building will be physically connected to the Colchester Research Facility and the two buildings will share a front door.

“The goal is to create a state scientific campus,” said Dr. Chen. “This collaboration is very much in line with the national trend in health sciences research to build facilities that bridge the distance from the research bench to the community to health policy. This positions us to meet the future challenges of emerging diseases and health threats.”

“The co-location allows us to bring professionals at the Health Department who are actively engaged in public health issues together with UVM faculty who work nationally and internationally to investigate patterns of disease and look for new diagnostics and treatments,” said John Evans, UVM senior advisor for business engagement.

Health and UVM officials cited a number of mutual benefits, such as the ability to partner on specialized medical research, the potential for increasing research funding and enhanced recruitment, and cost economies for both resulting from sharing facilities.

From the Health Department’s point of view, being connected to a major medical research facility keeps public health on the leading edge of the health sciences, expands the training ground for future laboratorians, and provides surge capacity with specialized labs, instruments and personnel in the event of a public health emergency that requires 24/7 response.

For UVM, there are many benefits from sharing specialized space for biomedical research with health department scientists, including expanded opportunities for cooperative projects and increased external funding. In addition, the state-of-the-art facilities provide training and internships in research and public health for undergraduate, graduate and medical students.

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