

Dental Public Health Activity Summary

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Well-Ahead Louisiana's Third Grade Basic Screening Survey, 2016-2018

Objective

The Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Public Health, Well-Ahead Oral Health Promotion focuses on promoting the importance of good oral health through education, community outreach, and addressing barriers in Louisiana that keep our children from achieving good oral health.

Rationale

Louisiana has been averaging less than two out of every five third graders with present dental sealants and only **44%** percent of Louisiana residents receive fluoridated water compared to **74.4%** nationwide.

Implementation of the 2016-2018 3rd grade Basic Screening Survey (BSS) began in September 2016 despite two years of program challenges that delayed the initiation of the project. Data for this BSS was collected over the course of two school years. Prior to the 2016-2018 BSS, Louisiana 3rd grade oral health data had not been collected and since the 2007-2009 BSS. During the 2007-2009 3rd grade BSS school nurses screened a total of 2,642 children in 75 schools. Evaluation of the 2007-2009 data determined that 41.9% of children screened had untreated cavities, 65.7% had dental caries experience, only 33.2% had sealants present, and 42.7% had to be referred to dentists for treatment urgency.

Methods

Each school system throughout the State of Louisiana uses a unique structure and protocols for allowing outside programs into their schools. Determining these protocols and navigating through each individual school system was the first step in obtaining approval to conduct the BSS. The administrator/curriculum demands placed on educators often take priority over non-mandatory external programs, which is why the importance of youth oral health screening for early detection of oral health related problems and its relation to improved child learning was stressed as a technique for getting into the schools.

Obtaining school support for this process took several approaches. There were various meetings between staff at the Health and Education Departments. Additionally, providing information at school administration events, making school district Superintendent phone calls and sending emails, school administrator/school board phone calls and emails, and in person school visits resulted in 49 out of 60 randomly selected elementary schools allowing a hired state dental hygienist to conduct the oral health BSS at their school site.

Dental hygienists were trained to conduct the screenings in selected schools.

Findings

During the initial year of implementation, Oral Health Promotion secured and conducted screenings in 36 of the selected sample size elementary schools. As of May 2017, 947 3rd grade students received an oral health screening; oral health education and oral health take home supplies in these 36 schools throughout the state. During the second year of implementation, an additional 317 students from 13 schools within the sample size participated in the BSS.

Evaluation of data collected revealed that 26.2% of 3rd grade students had untreated cavities compared to 16.2% nationally, 56.4% had dental caries experience compared to 51.7% nationally, 28.7% had sealants present compared to 40.7% nationally, 23.1% had to be referred to a dentist for early treatment or urgent care. The findings indicate that 3rd grade students experience less untreated cavities and dental caries than previously reported in 2007-2009 and although Louisiana is not close to the national averages the state is on track to meet the Health People 2020 goals for 3rd graders.

[Bright Smiles for Bright Futures full report.](#)

Lessons Learned:

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