

Abstract

Addressing oral health disparities through school-based health programs: An initiative to connect low-income children to oral health and supportive services

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background: Tooth decay is the most prevalent chronic disease of children in the nation that is largely preventable. In Harford County, Maryland, the percentage of Medicaid-enrolled children receiving oral health care is worse than the state (59.1% and 63.7% respectively). Untreated tooth decay can cause pain, which may ultimately lead to inadequate nutrition, missed school days, and diminished ability to learn.

description: HCHD has successfully implemented a school-based dental screening and fluoride varnish program for low-income pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students for many years. The program addresses oral health disparities by assessing children's current oral health status using a red, yellow, and green rating system, applying fluoride varnish, and providing oral health education and resources to parents. Case management services are provided for children with urgent dental needs and children are connected to the health department's dental clinic and other supportive services, as needed.

lessons learned: Data collection and analysis will be completed by June 2020. Children with a "yellow" or "red" rating have early or urgent needs, which is estimated to be 10-35% of those screened. The total number of children with program consents compared to the total number of children enrolled is tracked and estimated to be 50-75%.

implications: The relationship between students who received dental screenings and fluoride varnish treatments should be further explored to see if children previously in the "yellow" and "red" group transitioned to the "green" category.

Assessment of individual and community needs for health education
Chronic disease management and prevention
Clinical medicine applied in public health
Implementation of health education strategies, interventions and programs
Other professions or practice related to public health
Public health or related education

