

Dental screening and referral: program outcomes after two years

Culler, C, RDH, MPH, Henshaw M, DMD, MPH

Objective: To evaluate the effect of screening and referral program on oral health status of Pre-K through 8th grade students during two consecutive school years in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

Methods: 774 students were assigned to one of four categories based on dental need. After year two, students were divided into those whose oral health improved or remained problem free (favorable outcome), and those whose oral health declined or who continued to need treatment (unfavorable outcome). The two groups were compared to determine if individual student characteristics predicted oral health outcome.

Results: 70% of students re-screened had a favorable outcome while 30% had unfavorable. Students in grade 1 during year 1 were more likely to have a poor outcome than students in other grades ($p < 0.001$). Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian native speakers were also more likely to have a poor outcome ($p = .03$). There was no difference in oral health outcome by race, sex, or enrollment in the free/reduced lunch program (representing lower income).

Conclusions: Oral health status among students screened did not improve as much as expected at year 2 screenings. While 417 (54 %) students needed no dental care at either screening, 235 did not obtain necessary treatment, perhaps due to lack of access to affordable care. In 2003, a new school-based clinic opened to address this need by offering free restorative and preventive care.