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A Six-Year Outcome Comparison of an Oral Health Program for Elementary and Preschool Children in a Rural Health Department District in Central Nebraska

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Abstract

Loup Basin Public Health Department (LBPHD) is a nine county, 7,000 plus square mile health department district in central Nebraska which has a sparse population of just over 30,000 residents. According to the Nebraska Rural Health Advisory Commission, eight of the nine counties are state-designated shortage areas for general dentistry. In 2005, LBPHD established the Loup Basin Smiles dental program for preschool and elementary students in the district. This program offers an oral screening and fluoride varnish application by registered dental Hygienists and provides immediate referrals for acute and chronic oral health conditions.

Objective

To compare data from school year one (2006-07) against school year six (2011-12) to evaluate program effectiveness.



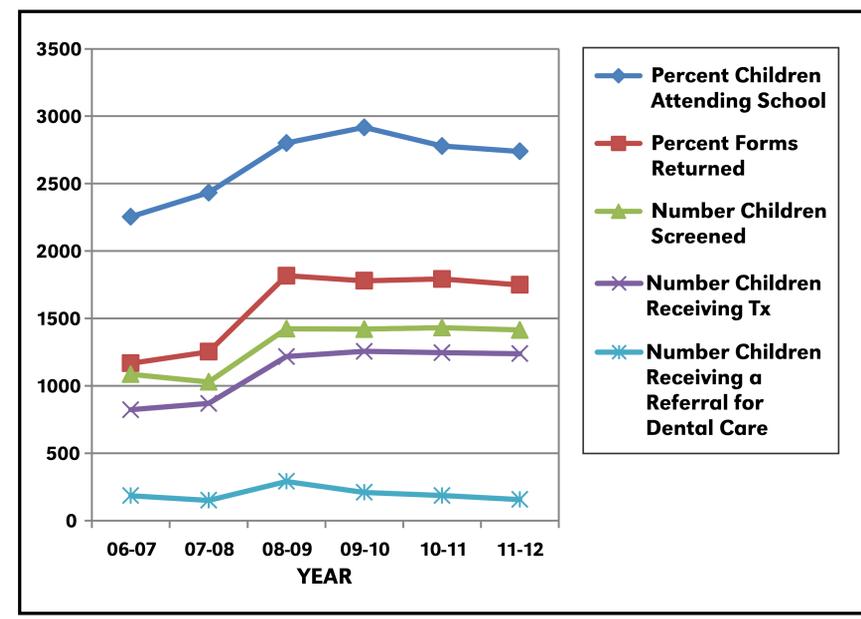
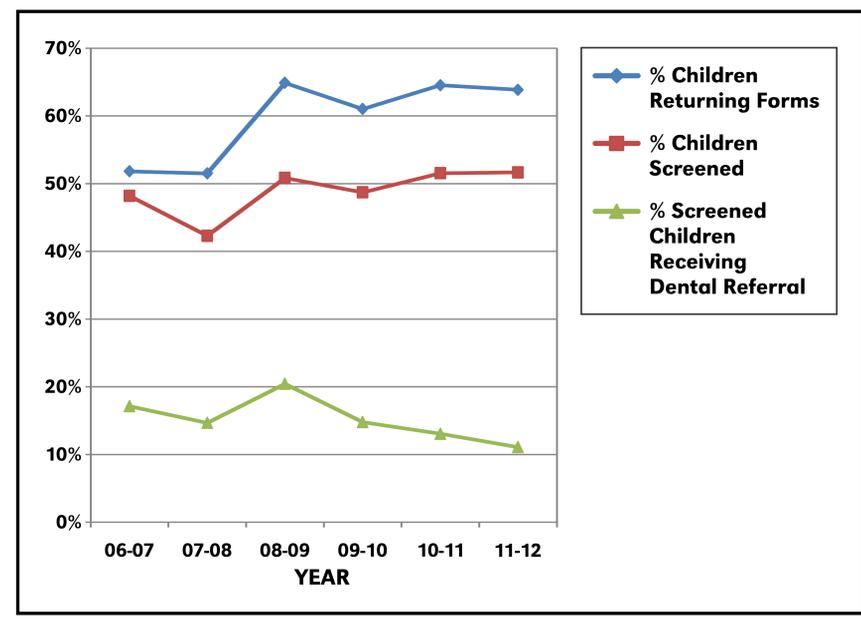
Methods

LBPHD has collected data each year since the program inception which includes the number of children in each school, forms returned, oral screenings, fluoride varnish applications and immediate referrals. In year one, 1,168 students returned permission forms compared to 1,749 students in year six.

Results

The percentage of children screened needing an immediate referral to a dentist has been reduced from 17.1% in year one to 11.1% in year six, resulting in a 35% overall decrease.

Meanwhile, the number of children screened has increased from 1,086 students in year one to 1,415 students in year six.



Conclusion

The Loup Basin Smiles program has been effective in improving the oral health of children that participated in the program as demonstrated by the 35% decrease in immediate referrals made to local dentists from year one to year six.