

Benefits of School Health Programs

LPHAs provide health related services in schools and pre-schools including health education, screenings, maintenance of health records, basic nursing services and referrals as needed to other health care providers. These services keep kids healthy and avoid school absences, which results in economic cost savings to schools, parents, and the parents' employers. These services are distinct and different from the services provided in schools as part of special education services authorized under IDEA.

Examples of services include health screenings (e.g., vision, hearing), basic nursing care including chronic disease management such as asthma, education for staff, students and parents, immunizations compliance, state mandated reports and referrals, and dental preventive services/screening.

The Evidence:	In Missouri:
<p>The Surgeon General's recent report states that oral health is essential to the general health and well-being of all Americans.¹</p> <p>Dental care can be either preventive or restorative. Preventive care, such as tooth cleaning and dental varnish, is aimed at avoiding dental problems. Restorative care repairs problems such as those caused by tooth decay and periodontal disease.</p> <p>Even when poor and near-poor children have access to a dentist, they may not receive generally accepted recommended preventive care such as dental varnish. Dental varnish prevents tooth decay, saves money, and is an important preventive measure.</p> <p><i>Working on getting number of schools served by LPHAs for school nursing services.</i> <i>Exploring asthma related to disease mgt. and associated cost savings.</i></p>	<p>The PSP program is a free community-based program currently available to any child (infant to age 18) in the state of Missouri. PSP involves coordination between DHSS, LPHAs, schools, Head Start Programs, oral health professionals, and families. LPHAs serve in coordination, facilitation, and referral for oral health needs.</p> <p>Children who participate in the PSP receive an annual oral screening conducted by a local dentist or dental hygienist, an application of fluoride varnish twice per calendar year, oral health education materials (including a free toothbrush and toothpaste), and an oral health note indicating the need for dental treatment.</p> <p>During FY 12, PSP served over 63,000 children in Missouri. Fluoride varnish has been shown to reduce the occurrence of cavities by 40%. A total of 42% of children have cavities in one or more teeth, with a standard cost of \$50 per filling. This results in savings of \$50 per tooth varnish application. For the 63,000 children served in the PSP program, an estimated cost savings of \$525,000 is realized.</p>

¹ Department of Health and Human Services [U.S.]. Oral health in America: a report of the Surgeon General. Rockville (MD): National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health; 2000.

Other Local Public Health Stories:

City of St. Louis: “Robert” is a 15 year old freshman student at Cardinal Ritter College Prep High School; he was diagnosed with hypertension since second grade. His physician recently started him on a new medication and he needed closer monitoring of his blood pressure during the first three months of taking the new medication.

The School Health Nurse assigned to this particular school (Cardinal Ritter Prep) took “Robert’s” blood pressure twice a week for 12 weeks during the initiation of the medication, reported the number to the prescribing physician, and educated “Robert” about the importance of diet and medication adherence. “Robert” was a very busy student participating in sports and also a full night of homework each night; and admitting that he did not always make the best decisions related to diet and medication adherence.

The Impact: Over the 12 weeks that the School Health Nurse worked with “Robert”; his blood pressure consistently stayed within normal limits; he also reported better diet choices. More recently, the School Health Nurse spoke with his mother while attending a school event at which she thanked her for her efforts with her son and further informed the school health nurse that her son’s blood pressure had remained controlled and that her son no longer requires frequent blood pressure monitoring.

Moniteau County has a total of nine public (K-8) and Mennonite schools in the county that do not have nurses on their staff. The local public health department has provided support to these schools in many ways; vision screening being just one. With proper diagnosis of vision problems the possibility of a student’s success in school is greatly increased. Countless times a vision screening by a Moniteau County Health nurse has resulted in the discovery of a child with a very poor vision problem. Referrals are made to doctors or to other agencies to assist with vision care and the purchase of glasses if families cannot afford to see a physician.