

Telling Missouri's Public Health Stories



Community Health Fairs Provide Invaluable Services

Carefree 5-year-old Jessie couldn't wait to attend the health fair hosted by her local public health department. She was thrilled by the clown's balloon animals. She rifled through the handouts on each table looking for coloring books. And she picked up candy from every display table where the adults weren't watching. But her excitement faded when her mom insisted she stop at the booth offering free dental screenings. The dental hygienist told Jessie's mom she had several teeth that needed attention, and she needed to see a dentist soon.

Although it had been just a short time since her last dental exam, and she had not complained of any pain, Jessie had two teeth with cavities so deep the dentist recommended crowns. She had eight other cavities that required fillings. If it weren't for the free dental screening at the health fair, Jessie might not have visited the dentist in time to save her teeth.

Community health fairs are one of the most recognized forms of community-based health promotion in Missouri and a staple for many rural counties. Health fairs provide an opportunity for the local public health system to serve vulnerable populations, addressing disparity by offering no-cost or low-cost services focused around unmet health and wellness needs. Local residents come to collect information from a variety of vendors and to receive free screenings, like the dental screening Jessie received. Many rural Missourians who attend a local community health fair have no other access to the screenings provided there.



Vendors may vary from county-to-county, but typically include social services, health care providers, pharmacies, organizations that promote nutrition and physical activity, and education partners.

Research on the value of community health fairs is inconclusive on whether the benefits outweigh the costs or whether people who attend health fairs have improved health outcomes. Most local public health departments believe they are important and a good investment in community health.

Jessie's mom agrees. "I felt like such a bad mom! How could I not know my child had so many cavities? I'm so thankful for the dental screening Jessie got at the health fair. It saved her teeth!"

The #HealthierMO initiative is seeking more stories like this one that demonstrate how partners in Missouri's greater public health system are working together to transform the future of public health in our state and offer every resident the opportunity for a healthier life. If you have a story to share, message us on Facebook @HealthierMO or email Communications Coordinator Jaci McReynolds at jmcreynolds@healthiermo.org. Learn more about the initiative and how you can get involved at HealthierMO.org or on Facebook @HealthierMO.