

Special Olympics, Special Smiles (SOSS) 2000: Oral health status of the SOSS athletes

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Objective: To describe the oral health status of 9,318 Special Olympics athletes, using a standardized protocol, in order to better assess and address the oral health needs of persons with mental retardation.

Methods: Boston University School of Dental Medicine (BUSDM) coordinated US and International standardized train the trainer sessions for 34 local Data Coordinators, who in turn trained screeners and recorders on the local level to generate reliable and valid using a standardized screening protocol. The protocol was developed in 1996 as a collaboration of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Special Olympics, Inc. and BUSDM.

Data obtained included event specifics, athlete demographics, dental history, and oral screening findings on the frequency of oral pain, personal self-care, treatment urgency, edentulism, untreated decay, filled and missing teeth, presence of sealants, injury, fluorosis, and gingival signs. Athletes received a report card, referral guidance, personalized oral health instruction and various self-care products.

Results: From March through June 2000, screenings were completed on a convenience sample of 9,318 athletes from 32 US sites, representing 26 states, as well as The Netherlands and Israel. Athletes ranged in age from 8-81 years, and all consented to an oral screening examination. Overall, untreated decay and gingival signs were observed in 25.71% and 42.15% of the athletes, respectively. Less than 15% of athletes have dental sealants.

Conclusion: More than one million athletes representing more than 140 countries participated in 2000 Special Olympics events. Based on the data obtained on a sample of approx. 1% of athletes, there is a need to increase the availability of preventive and restorative dental services to reduce the health disparities faced by this population.