

Special Olympics Health Promotion



Health Promotion uses interactive educational tools and displays, motivational literature and demonstrations to heighten the awareness of athletes, reinforcing the need to improve and maintain an enhanced level of wellness and self-care.

IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT:

Health Promotion events have found that a large percentage of Special Olympics athletes have limited knowledge of proper health practices.

60% adult athletes are overweight or obese

22% have low bone density

29% children and adolescents are overweight or obese

62,469 examinations performed in 69 participating countries.

GOALS:

1. Encourage and enhance healthy behaviors; reduce risky behaviors; improve self-efficacy and self-advocacy; and increase the investment of health promotion leaders for people with intellectual disabilities.
2. Increase awareness of and response to infectious diseases such as Malaria, Tuberculosis, and HIV in developing nations.
3. Develop a body of knowledge about the overall health of children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

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In The Field

Programs around the world often must adjust to local situations when implementing Healthy Athletes events, but in Malawi, the organizers of a program funded through a Health Promotion community-based grant took creative problem-solving to new heights when teaching hygiene at the Kalema Primary School. By inverting plastic, water-filled Coke bottles and creating a tap, they illustrated hand-washing techniques to more than 40 Special Olympics athletes and their parents and coaches, despite no running water.

"Prior to this idea, very few athletes were washing hands due to the unreliable water sources which were available," said Felix Chisowa, Acting Country Director for Special Olympics Malawi.

The lack of effective hand-washing contributes to high rates of intestinal, respiratory, and other diseases and infections, particularly among children. Thanks to the Health Promotion program, however, athletes and their families in Kalema are better educated and aware of the dangers of poor hygiene.

