

FINAL REPORT

Mercury Exposure Reduction Program (MERP)



April 30, 2019

Introduction and Summary:

First 5 Yolo is part of the statewide First 5 network of county commissions (formed through the passage of Proposition 10) with nearly 20-years of on-the-ground experience making children healthy, safe, and ready to learn. The Commission's investments and daily work also aim to strengthen countywide systems and networks that support these children and their families.

First 5 Yolo funds a variety of programs across Yolo County that provide a broad range of services to families aimed at ensuring parents are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to support their children's health, safety, and readiness to learn. This includes both board-based, general population program strategies, as well as targeted approaches to reach the most vulnerable and highest-risk families across Yolo County.

In an effort to achieve broad reach within Yolo County to share MERP messages, First 5 Yolo identified two of its larger programs, through which, materials and information could be shared:

Help Me Grow Yolo (HMG) is an early childhood mental health program that takes a systems approach to the identification of early childhood mental health issues for the prevention of later and more entrenched concerns. The lead direct service agency for this First 5 program is Northern California Children's Therapy Center with Yolo County Children's Alliance (a former MERP grant recipient), Empower Yolo, and Yolo Crisis Nursery providing outreach and support across the County.

HMG works directly with families, childcare providers, medical providers, County agencies, and other agencies focused on children's services. It offers free developmental screening for children 0-5, a free access line for providers and families to receive information and support from infant-child specialists, promotes the importance of developmental screening at meetings and events across Yolo County, and offers resources/referrals and information for all who utilize the system. While year to year numbers fluctuate, Help Me Grow Yolo has approximately 25,000 touches in the community annually and completes more than 1,000 unique screenings annually.

Play School Experience (PSE) is a program of First 5 Yolo that is implemented by the three Family Resource Centers serving families across Yolo County: Yolo County Children's Alliance, Empower Yolo, and RISE Inc. PSE's purpose is to provide a forum for parents to better learn to become their child(ren)'s first teacher. Early Learning Associates (ELAs) facilitate weekly drop in play-based groups across the County (Davis, Woodland, West Sacramento, Clarksburg, Esparto, Winters, and Knights Landing) during which children and their parents participate in developmentally appropriate activities and learn how to keep their children healthy, safe, and ready to learn. The program is open to any family with a child aged 0-5 and their parents or caregivers. Additionally, ELAs receive ongoing training and support through bi-monthly staff development meetings.

Each session of PSE is guided by a lesson plan that incorporates the Five Protective Factors for Family Strengthening and outlines learning objectives for parents. Annually, this program reaches more than 350 parents, and their respective children.

Implementation by Program:

First 5 Yolo worked with its partners to identify activities for the effective integration of MERP messages into its programs to maximize reach and understanding. Activities were as follows:

Training:

- A leadership training for the First 5 Yolo Contract Manager, HMG staff, and the Lead Early Learning Associate was held to ensure deep understanding of the MERP message. A secondary training for the PSE Early Learning Associates was also provided.
- The F5Y Contract manager regularly check-in and provided support to PSE staff during bi-monthly staff development meetings

Help Me Grow:

- MERP materials are included in all Resource Packets: Providers (childcare and medical) and families who complete a developmental screen receive results from HMG staff that provide activities, resources, and information specific to the child's needs. MERP materials were included in all packets sent out ensuring that all families received this critical information. Additionally, as providers also received the materials, they were able to share the MERP messages with other families who did not come into direct contact with HMG.
- MERP materials and message shared at all events and community meetings that HMG attends allowing for message sharing with additional providers countywide.
- MERP message and materials shared via social media

First 5 Yolo:

- Include MERP materials on the First 5 Yolo Website
- Share MERP materials and messaging via social media
- Provide coordination and support to all partners implementing the program

As part of the development of an integration plan, First 5 Yolo also developed an evaluation plan to track reach and understanding. Result obtained are outlines the next section.

Summary and Recommendations:

With First 5 Yolo implementation, placemats and low-literacy materials were distributed. Program staff noted that the low-literacy materials were the best received and distributed however, because the low-literacy materials were only available in English and Spanish, not all families were able to access the information. Yolo County has a diverse population and staff have appreciated that the placemats are available in a variety of languages. In West Sacramento, there is a growing population of Farsi speaking families and having materials available in Farsi or Dari would be helpful as few

program staff speak Farsi or Dari and it was challenging to share the MERP message with this population, specifically.

We also received feedback from staff regarding the size of the placemats. Staff noted that typical placemats for children to eat or utilize during activities are generally larger than those provided by the MERP. It was also recommended that, should the placemats be intended for child use, it may be helpful to modify the materials so that they placemats could be more interactive which would encourage parents and children to interact with the information while either coloring, tracing fish, etc. Since the materials are already laminated, they are compatible with dry-erase markers and parents/children can repeatedly use them which provides opportunities for ongoing engagement with the information.

First 5 Yolo is proud of the work of its partners to share the MERP message to educate families about the dangers of mercury consumption and share information about which fish are safe to eat, safe preparation methods, and recommended consumption guidelines for different population groups. We are especially proud that staff, finding value in the information, went above and beyond the activities outlined in the MOU to ensure the information was shared.

Since materials were received and trainings were completed in mid-November 2018, the following results were obtained:

Play School Experience:

- 54 presentations were delivered during PSE across Yolo County
- 448 families were trained on the MERP message
- 195 surveys were collected
- 100% of surveyed families reported understanding that mercury is dangerous
- 95% of surveyed families reported knowing which fish are safe to eat

In addition to the data collected and outlined above, PSE staff went above and beyond to share the MERP messages. Examples include: providing materials to colleagues to share with clients who participated in other programs run by their respective FRCs; sharing materials through personal networks (e.g., family, friends, other community groups, etc.); and providing materials to the local libraries, afterschool programs, and community health groups.

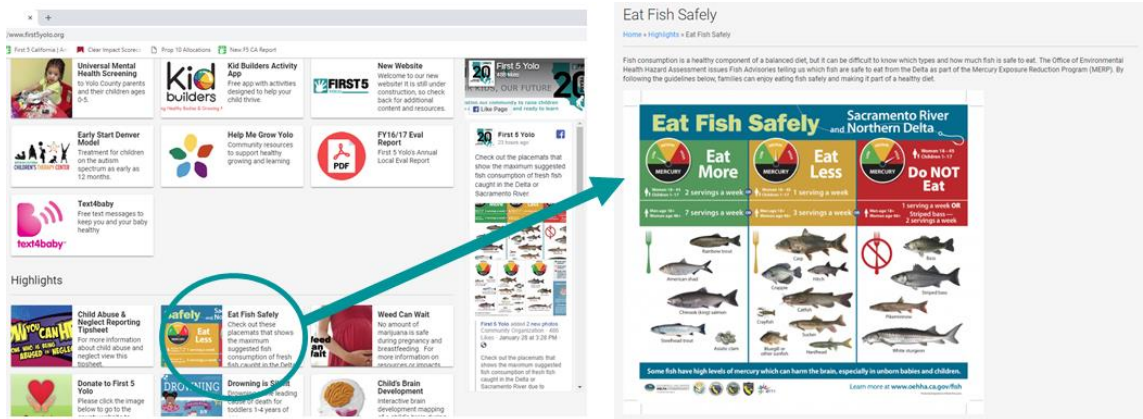


Help Me Grow Yolo:

- 240 families received MERP materials via resource packets
- HMG staff distributed materials at 14 events held across the County
- Materials and information was shared at 25 community meetings including meetings with Yolo County Health and Human Services (multiple collaboratives), UCDavis Mind Institute, IMPACT, CommuniCare, CapitolCROWD, Strategies, Yes Yolo, etc.). Attendance at these meetings is estimated at 425 individual service providers with countywide reach.
- MERP Messages were shared on social media and reached 74 users.

First 5 Yolo:

- Dedicated page on the First 5 Yolo website (<https://www.first5yolo.org/highlights/eat-fish-safely>) to access MERP materials. The dedicated page is accessible from the First 5 Yolo Home page:



- MERP materials shared via Facebook to nearly 500 followers. Example of post:

