

Report: Summer 2018 HmongTown Marketplace & Festival Community Outreach

MERCURY IN SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS AND FISH

Public Health Issue

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) MN FEET Study results showed some Asian and Latina women had elevated levels of mercury in their urine, likely linked with using skin lightening products. Mercury in skin lightening products is poisonous and considered hazardous waste.

Additionally, some pregnant Asian women had elevated levels of mercury in their baby's cord blood, likely linked with eating fish high in mercury. Women who are pregnant are encouraged to eat fish very low in mercury because the benefits from fish outweigh the risks if consuming low mercury fish.



Goal

Engage with Hmong community to empower individuals with the knowledge of mercury in skin lightening products and fish to influence family and friends to avoid skin lightening products and to eat fish low in mercury.

Objective 1: Avoid skin lightening products

Promote key message that everyone is beautiful and to love one's own skin.

Objective 2: Avoid skin lightening products

Inform Hmong community members that skin lightening products:

- May contain mercury

- Mercury in skin lightening products will contaminate and poison the air
- The type of mercury in skin lightening products is poisonous

Objective 3: Eat fish low in mercury

Promote key message that the benefits of eating fish outweigh the risks if choosing to eat fish very low or low in mercury.

Audience

Hmong community, primarily women, elders, and adolescent girls.

Distribution

Mercury in skin lightening products and mercury in fish handouts will be available during community outreach tabling sessions.

Key Messages

1. Love Your Skin
2. Put Fish On Your Plate

Outreach methods

1. **In depth conversations:** The Hmong community is an oral culture. Face-to-face conversations are more effective than a handout.
2. **Opt for more health information:** Community members were asked if they were interested in more information for their family's health, in regards to their skin and fish consumption. If they said yes, two educational handouts were provided to be read later.
3. **March in parade:** MDH staff and Hamline University volunteer walked in the HmongTown Festival parade on Saturday, June 23. The emcee announced the #LoveYourSkin and to protect one's skin and health.

A typical day at the HmongTown Marketplace

We sat at a table outside of the West Building in between the building with food and the open air market area. Whenever someone passed by, we would ask if they wanted to **opt for more health information**. When they were interested in more information about their skin or fish, we took the opportunity to share key messages and have **in depth conversations**.

Annual two-day HmongTown Festival

The 2018 HmongTown Festival brought together ~15,000 people over two days. Organizers of the HmongTown Festival stated that an educational booth, such as MDH's booth, would need to catch the attention of children to bring in adults to share any health information. Working together, organizers and MDH developed ideas that would draw in people to our booth. We created a:

1. **Fishing game** included Minnesota fish commonly caught and consumed by the Hmong community. The fish were broken up into 'very low', 'low', and 'medium' mercury categories to teach how often a woman who is or may become pregnant or child under 15 years old may eat fish safely. MDH also provided individual sized Goldfish crackers to children who participated in the fishing game. Over two days, 468 packets of Goldfish were distributed to children who participated in the fishing station.
2. **Photo booth** to promote a positive body image loving one's skin. Positive messages were written in both English and Hmong for people to play with and photograph using the hashtag #LoveYourSkin.
3. **Free sunscreen** was provided at the booth to encourage safe skin practices. Numerous people utilized the sunscreen when the sun was shining; few chose to apply sunscreen during cloudy weather.

Once we had attracted children to engage in one of our activities we would engage with parent(s), or with young adults who would stop by.

On Saturday, June 23, our outreach method was to only pass out educational handouts to those we had an **in depth conversations** with as a supplement to the conversation.

On Sunday, June 24, our outreach method was to have **in depth conversations** when possible, but to primarily ask if they wanted to **opt for more health information** and provide handouts if they said yes.



Interactive activities were developed in collaboration between HmongTown Festival organizer and MDH. Community engagement was a critical piece of success in developing the educational materials and interactive activities.

Language skills present during outreach days

| Date | Time | MDH Staff | MDH Student Worker (speaks Hmong) | MDH Staff | Hamline University Recent Graduate Volunteer (speaks Hmong) | Hamline University Volunteer (speaks Hmong) |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------|---|---|
| Friday, May 25 | 10:20 am - 12:30 pm | Michelle Gin | Palli Lee | Pat McCann | | |
| Saturday, June 23 | 9:00 am – 4:30 pm | Michelle Gin | -- | Pat McCann | Michael Xiong | |

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|----------------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------|---|---|
| Sunday, June 24 | 9:00 am – 4:30 pm | Michelle Gin | -- | Pat McCann | Michael Xiong | Padee Vue |
| Friday July 20 | 11:00 am - 1:00 pm | Michelle Gin | -- | -- | | |
| Friday, August 17 | 10:45 am - 1:00 pm | Michelle Gin | Palli Lee | -- | Michael Xiong | |
| Friday, September 28 | 11:00 am - 2:00 pm | Michelle Gin | -- | -- | | |

Results: Handouts distributed

| Date | Event | Attendance | Love Your Skin handout | Put Fish on Your Plate handout | Goldfish crackers | Outreach Method |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Friday, May 25 | Typical day at marketplace | ~100 | 16 | 19 | -- | In depth conversations |
| Saturday, June 23 | HmongTown Festival | 8,000+ | 34 | 58 | 233 | In depth conversations |
| Sunday, June 24 | HmongTown Festival | 7,000+ | 316 | 292 | 234 | Opt for more information / In depth conversations |
| Friday July 20 | Typical day at marketplace | ~60 *raining | 14 | 13 | 6 | In depth conversations / Opt for more information |
| Friday, August 17 | Typical day at marketplace | ~80 | 17 | 11 | 6 | In depth conversations |
| Friday, September 28 | Typical day at marketplace | ~80 | 25 | 27 | 4 | In depth conversations |

Results: Conversations

| Date | Event | in English | in Hmong | in Hmonglish | with women | with men | with youth |
|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|--------------|----------------------------------|----------|------------|
| Friday, May 25 | Typical day at marketplace | 12 | 6 | 0 | 16 | 2 | 0 |
| Saturday, June 23 | HmongTown Festival | Too many conversations to track. | | | Too many conversations to track. | | |
| Sunday, June 24 | HmongTown Festival | Too many conversations to track. | | | Too many conversations to track. | | |
| Friday July 20 | Typical day at marketplace | 13 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 3 |
| Friday, August 17 | Typical day at marketplace | 6 | 8 | 2 | 12 | 4 | 0 |
| Friday, September 28 | Typical day at marketplace | 27 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 9 | 0 |

Analysis

Weekend HmongTown Festival, June 23-34

Contributions to successful event:

- Hmong-speaking volunteer(s)
- Interactive activities
 - Fishing game
 - Photo stand
- Free snacks (Goldfish crackers)
- Free sunscreen
- 3-4 staff members allowed for efficient division of tasks for one staff person to engage with children in an educational game while another staff person shared key messages with the adult(s)
- Social media presence – designated social media staff posted live photos

Limitations to successful event:

- Limited language
- One booth adjacent to the MDH booth encroached upon our space and/or walkway space so people walking by had to go around the other booth's people.

Community presence makes a difference

MDH staff was in conversation with a member of the community at the HmongTown Festival. The community member realized the skincare product she used at home was pictured (right) in the educational handout MDH had provided her. After a longer discussion the woman, she understood that the skin lightening product was harmful to her health as well as the health of her multigenerational family home and that she needed to dispose of the product through a local hazardous waste site.



A typical day at the Marketplace - Fridays: May 25, July 20, August 17 and September 28

Compared to the June weekend festival, the Friday outreach days had a low impact on the number of people reached over a two-hour period. The Friday outreach days were held during the market's busier time of day – lunch time.

Hmong-speaking individuals were very beneficial to further conversations as well as to have conversations with those who primarily spoke Hmong. When a Hmong-speaker was not present, communication efforts were hindered or relied on children translating for their family.

When one MDH employee was mistaken for Hmong several times, it was helpful in breaking down cultural barriers.

Repeated visits in the Hmong community has led to community members becoming more familiar with MDH. Frequent visits has allowed MDH to build relations that will open the door to more opportunities.

Overall, Fridays at the HmongTown Marketplace are a regular business day without a high influx of guests. Outreach efforts are better utilized during events or planned activities. However, establishing our presence to gain familiarity and trust was a valuable use of time.

Selected recommendations

- MDH should have an educational booth with interactive activities for children each year at the HmongTown Festival
 - Consider sharing booth and costs among multiple MDH divisions
- Have engaging staff (preferable) and volunteers who speak Hmong present to interact with community
- If providing handouts to community members who opt for more information, have approximately 1,000 copies of each material during the HmongTown Festival weekend.

Photos from HmongTown Festival June 23-24, 2018



State Senator Fong Hawj visited the MDH booth.





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