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Alaska Health Facts

Tremendous changes have taken place in Alaska and in the arctic in the past 40 years. Now, in 1991, the health of Alaskans has never been better. The past three decades have seen an almost miraculous reduction in life-threatening infections and communicable diseases. The infant mortality rate has dropped to an all-time low. Death rates have fallen to an all-time low. And, the life expectancy of an Alaskan born in 1991 has never been higher.

- In 1950, the population of Alaska was 130,000 -- today we number approximately 550,000.
- In 1950, there were 35,000 Alaska Natives -- today they number more than 75,000 in Alaska and an additional 25,000 live elsewhere.
- In 1950, Alaska Natives had an infant mortality rate of 101/1000 live births. In 1979-1980, the infant mortality rate was 22.3/1000 live births.
- The Alaska Native death rate in 1950 was 1,742/100,000 persons. In 1980-1986, the rate was 726/100,000 persons.
- In 1946, tuberculosis was listed as the cause of death on 43% of all death certificates for Alaska Natives. From 1980-1989, only 13 of 19,820 Alaskans died from active tuberculosis.
- The life expectancy of Alaska Natives in 1950 was 47 years. In 1980 it was 67 years.
- In 1950, numerous deaths were caused by measles, whooping cough, rheumatic fever, syphilis, typhoid, and polio. No deaths from these causes occurred from 1980-1989.
- In 1947, school teacher at Barrow reported that of 30 children ages 5 to 6 who entered school, only 6 lived to finish.

In spite of great improvements in overall health status, many problems remain. Improvements in health status have not occurred equally in all groups and sub-populations.

- Although infant mortality improved dramatically in all groups, the infant mortality among Alaska Natives remains much higher than in other racial groups.

Annual Infant Mortality Per 1000 Live Births		
	1950	1979-80
Natives	101	22.3
Non-Natives	24	8.5

- Although the death rate decreased impressively, the death rate among Alaska Natives is more than twice that of non-Natives.

Average Annual Death Rate Per 100,000 Population		
	1950	1979-80
Natives	1742	726
Non-Natives	716	360

- Although the life expectancy of Alaskans has increased, the life expectancy of Alaska Natives remains less than non-Natives.

Life Expectancy of Alaskans (Years)		
	1950	1979-80
Natives	47	67
Non-Natives	66	73

Both nationally and in Alaska, injuries are the leading killers. Alaska is the youngest state in the United States with a median age of 28 years. Of all Alaskans, 90% are less than 50 years of age. In many villages, the median age is 17 years. Among Alaskans less than 50 years old, 70% of the deaths that occur are due to injuries.

Injuries cause of 29% of all deaths and 53% of all years of potential life lost in Alaskans.

- In 1950 there were only 6 suicides among Alaska Natives -- there are now 35 per year.
- In 1983-84, Alaska Natives committed suicide twice as often as non-Natives.

- In 1983-84, Alaska Native men, 20-24 years old, had a suicide rate of 257/100,000, 14 times higher than the suicide rate for the United States.
- In 1983-84 of all Alaskans who took their lives, 76% used firearms; most were acutely intoxicated with alcohol.
- From 1980-86, Alaska Native pedestrians were killed 4 times more frequently than non-Natives and in Anchorage, 16 times more frequently.
- From 1980-86, among adult Alaska Natives who died in pedestrian crashes, 85% were acutely intoxicated with an average blood alcohol level of 0.2 mg/dl.
- From 1980-89, 1,339 (7%) of 19,820 Alaskans died due to shootings.
- Although Alaska Natives comprised only 14% of the population, they accounted for 35% of the deaths from shootings.
- From 1980-89, 54 Alaskan children under 15 years old were killed by firearms.