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ALASKA'S IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM – A PUBLIC HEALTH SUCCESS STORY

Dramatic successes have been achieved in Alaska in preventing polio, diphtheria, pertussis, rubella, rubeola, tetanus, and mumps. During the last two decades, widespread use of vaccines against these diseases has been followed by significant reductions in incidence rates nationally and in Alaska. No cases of polio and only one case of tetanus have occurred in Alaska in the past 20 years. Since 1978, there has been only one reported case of diphtheria. Based on present trends, measles, rubella, and mumps may also be eradicated in Alaska early in the 1980's. Pertussis has become a rare disease.

Vaccine-Preventable Childhood Disease Case Rates,
Per 100,000 Population, Alaska, 1960, 1970, and 1980.

Disease	Case Rates		
	1960	1970	1980
Polio	.9	--	--
Diphtheria	.4	--	--
Pertussis	1.8	1.0	1.2
Rubella	146.4	46.3	3.0
Rubeola	557.1	47.3	1.5
Tetanus	--	--	--
Mumps	550.5	152.5	3.8

It is important to emphasize that these impressive decreases in disease incidence in Alaska have not led to any relaxation of immunization recommendations and requirements. While recommendations for vaccination against smallpox were retracted when **worldwide** eradication was achieved, such an accomplishment is not to be expected for any of the vaccine-preventable childhood diseases. The risk of acquiring these childhood diseases will continue and will remain many times higher than the risk of vaccine-associated side effects. Meanwhile there is always a chance that a group of susceptibles will develop in our population if complacency develops in vaccination efforts. Diphtheria incidence in Alaska proves this point well. Following a 10-year period from 1963 to 1972 without a single case of diphtheria, a 6-year recrudescence began in 1973 and reached a peak case rate of 2.7 in 1975. This was the highest diphtheria case-rate attained in Alaska in any year for which data is available. The outbreak of diphtheria in 1975 led to a statewide vaccination campaign in which 220,000 Alaskans were vaccinated against diphtheria and tetanus.

The Section of Communicable Disease Control continues to recommend the immunization of all infants in accordance with the Immunization Schedule of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the recommendations of the USPHS Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. All of the vaccine-preventable childhood diseases continue to be reportable diseases which require immediate epidemiologic investigation and institution of control measures. State regulations requiring proof of up-to-date immunization levels prior to admittance to schools and day care centers will continue to be vigorously enforced. Only a continued universal commitment by all Alaskans to disease prevention through immunization can ensure that the high immunization levels that have now been attained will be maintained in the future.