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## Alaska Maternal Hair Mercury Biomonitoring Program: Initial Results

In July 2002, the Alaska Division of Public Health (DPH) began the Statewide Maternal Hair Mercury Biomonitoring Program, offering free and confidential hair mercury testing to all pregnant women in Alaska. The program was begun to determine the amount of mercury exposure actually occurring among pregnant women in Alaska. The purpose of this bulletin is twofold, to present the first results of this new biomonitoring program and to request the help of all health care providers in Alaska to encourage their patients to participate.

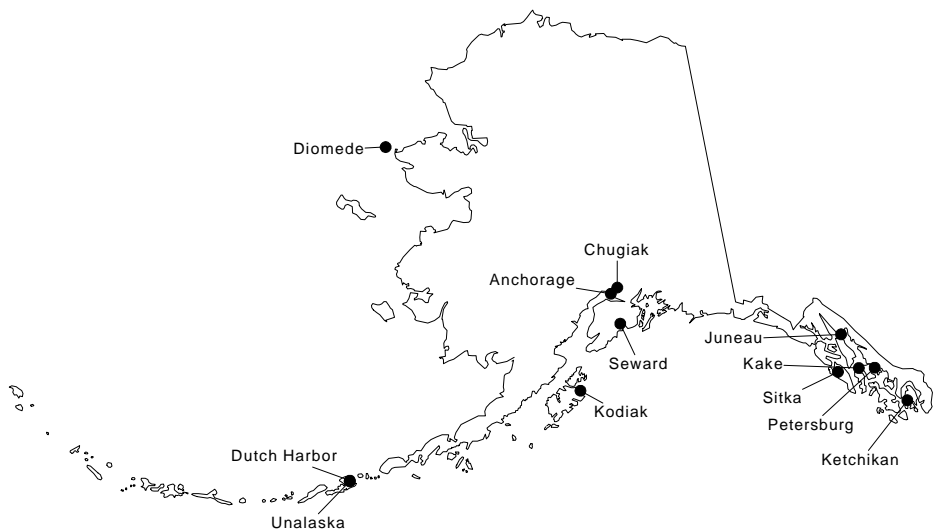
We have results from 56 samples from 12 Alaskan communities. (Figure 1) **Hair mercury concentrations were very low in all samples tested.** The overall mean hair mercury concentration was 0.58 mg/kg (parts per million, ppm), well below the World Health Organization level of concern of 10 mg/kg (ppm) (Figure 2).

These initial results provide evidence supporting the current State consensus dietary recommendations that all Alaskans, including pregnant women, women who are breast-feeding, women of childbearing age, and young children continue unrestricted consumption of fish from Alaskan waters. (*Epi Bulletin* No. 6, June 15, 2001)

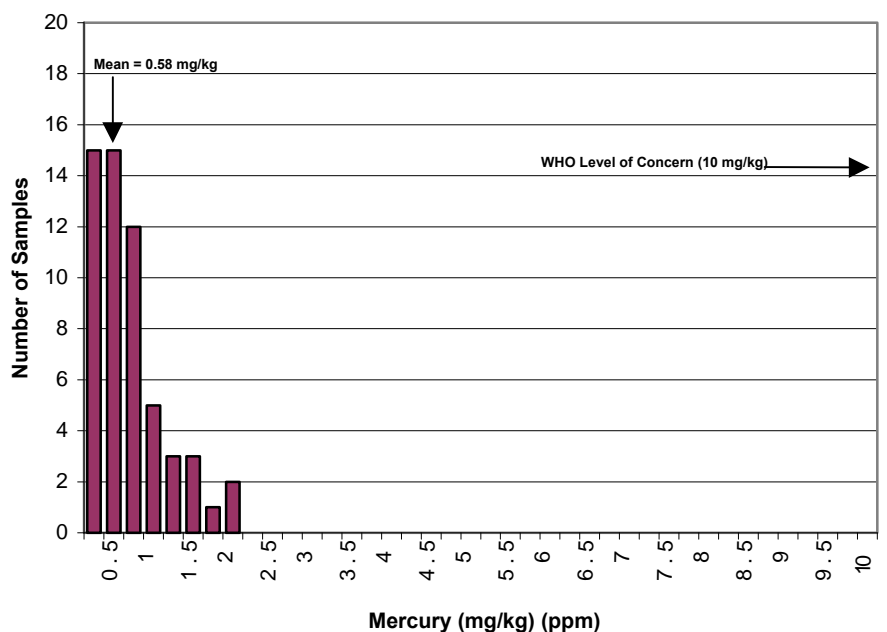
We urge health care providers to support participation of their patients in this biomonitoring program. We seek additional samples to monitor mercury exposures throughout Alaska. We ask all Alaska health care providers to inform all pregnant women about this important program and to encourage them to participate. Our goal is to offer routine testing to all pregnant women in Alaska on an ongoing basis.

Results from the maternal hair mercury biomonitoring program will document mercury exposure, enable monitoring of levels over time, and provide information essential for optimal Alaska dietary recommendations.

Figure 1. Locations of persons tested



(N = 56)



To participate in the Statewide Maternal Hair Mercury Biomonitoring Program and for information on how to collect and submit hair samples, contact the Section of Epidemiology, Environmental Public Health Program 907-269-8000. Additional information can be found in *Epidemiology Bulletins* No. 6 (June 15, 2001) and No. 11 (June 4, 2002) available at <http://www.akepi.org>