

Bill Hogan
Commissioner
P.O. Box 110601
Juneau, AK 99811-0601
www.hss.state.ak.us



Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Contact: Ann Potempa, (907) 269-7957, Cell (907) 230-4001, ann.potempa@alaska.gov
Greg Wilkinson, (907) 269-7285, Cell (907) 382-7032, gregory.wilkinson@alaska.gov

State Web site, public service announcements launched for Autism Awareness Month *Book sales, walks and concert raise awareness, funds*

(Anchorage, AK) — The Alaska Autism Program within the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services has expanded its Web site and produced public service announcements to raise awareness statewide about autism spectrum disorders. Children and adults with these disorders have varying degrees of developmental disabilities that can cause social, communication and behavioral challenges.

About 1 percent of all babies born in Alaska each year will develop an autism spectrum disorder, according to estimates from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In other words, about 11,000 Alaskans will be born this year, and 110 of them will be diagnosed with an autism disorder by age 8.

The Alaska Autism Program's PSAs will begin airing on television and radio stations throughout Alaska beginning mid April, which is Autism Awareness Month. The announcements emphasize early developmental signs that may indicate autism in children, as well as provide telephone numbers and the Web site, <http://www.autism.alaska.gov>, to find autism resources throughout the state.

Jimael Lawson, public health specialist with the state's Autism Program, said it was important to feature Alaskans who are personally touched by autism, and the television PSA includes a father and his autistic son from Kotzebue.

"We know that children with autism living in our rural communities are diagnosed an average of two to three years later than kids living in larger urban areas," Lawson said. "Those years are critical for early intervention that can greatly improve the childrens' lives during school years and into adulthood. Our autism program hopes to reach families and health providers who may not otherwise know where to turn if they have questions about their child's development."

Community organizations throughout Alaska have scheduled events and activities to raise awareness and funds for autism. A number of these events are listed below. For more related activities, visit <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/autism/calendar.htm>.

- **Book fairs**
Soldotna: River City Books, 43977 Sterling Hwy, Friday, April 2, 12 p.m– 2 p.m.
Fairbanks: Barnes & Noble, 421 Mehar Ave., Saturday, April 3, 11 a.m– 6 p.m.
<http://www.asagoldenheart.org>

- **Alaska Walk for Autism**
Juneau, Soldotna and Fairbanks: Saturday, April 10, 11 a.m.–1:00 p.m.
Anchorage: Sunday, April 18, 2–5 p.m.
<http://www.akwalks4autism.org>

- **Autism Rocks! Concert**
Friday, April 16, 7–11 p.m.
Anchorage : Snow Goose Theatre, 717 W. Third Ave.
<http://www.stonesoupgroup.org>

- **Bear Tooth Theatre Movie Event**
Monday, April 26, 5:30 p.m.
Anchorage: Bear Tooth Theatre, 1230 W. 27th Ave.
“Her Name is Sabine” — a French documentary about a woman with autism
<http://beartooththeatre.net/specialtyfilmfevents.htm#sabine>

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