

Chronic Disease Facts: 2019 Brief Report



Chronic diseases—those that go on for a long time and often don't go away completely—are among the most common and costly health problems, and we often know how to prevent them. Examples of diseases people live with for long periods, possibly a lifetime, are heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, asthma, and arthritis.

Chronic Disease Illness and Death

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Alaska.¹

- The most common causes of **cancer death** in Alaska in 2017 were (1) lung, (2) colorectal, (3) pancreas, and (4) breast.²
- The most commonly **diagnosed cancers** in Alaska in 2016 were (1) breast, (2) lung, (3) prostate, and (4) colorectal. These 4 cancers accounted for 49% of all cancer cases in Alaska.¹
- In 2017, heart disease accounted for 18% of deaths and stroke accounted for 4% in Alaska.¹
- Having type 2 diabetes doubles or triples the risk of death.³
- Arthritis is the most common cause of disability in the U.S.⁴

Healthy Habits

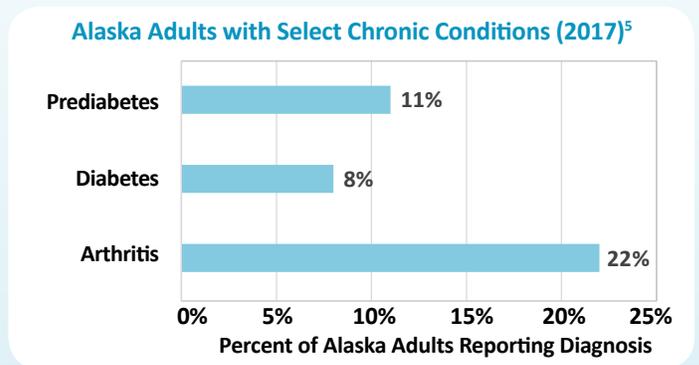
Four healthy lifestyle factors—never smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, being physically active, and following a healthy diet—are linked to as much as an 80% reduction in the risk of developing the most common and deadly chronic diseases.⁶

Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity

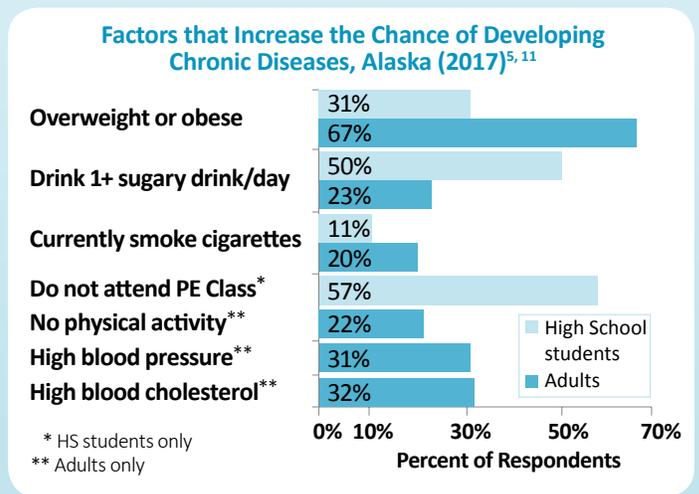
For almost 25 years, the percentage of adult Alaskans with obesity has continued to rise.⁵ Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating contribute to overweight and obesity and a number of chronic diseases, including some cancers, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.⁷ In addition to health consequences, overweight and obesity among high school students and young adults impacts national security. Weight-related conditions are the most common disqualification for applicants for military service.⁸

Tobacco

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the United States, and smoking has been



causally linked to diseases in nearly all organs of the body.⁹ In Alaska, smoking results in an estimated 697 deaths and \$839 million in direct medical expenses and lost earnings due to those deaths every year.¹⁰



Preventive Health Services

Regular visits to a health care provider can both prevent and detect diseases in their earlier, more treatable stages, which significantly reduces the risk of illness, disability, and early death.¹²

Alaskans' access to health services depends on many things, including whether they have a regular health care provider, whether they have transportation to get to their provider, their ability to find a provider with whom they

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(continued) can communicate and trust, and whether they have health insurance.¹³ Access to health care impacts everything from prevention of disease and disability, quality of life, and life expectancy. Limited access can reduce the possibility of receiving preventive health care, including routine disease screening and immunizations.

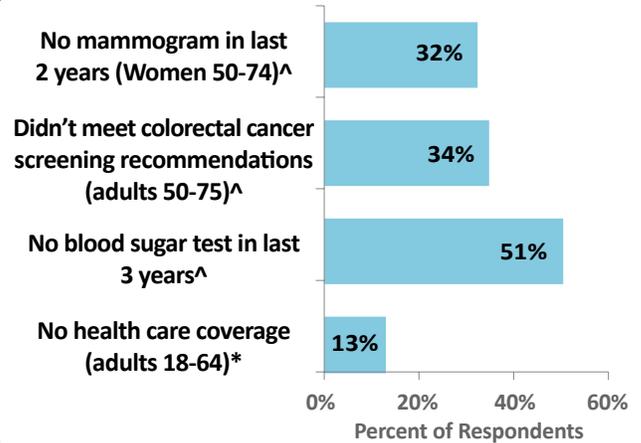
Early Detection

Uncontrolled blood sugar increases the risks for heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, and amputation.¹⁴ Mammography screening has been shown to reduce death due to breast cancer.¹⁵ Colorectal cancer screening reduces death from colorectal cancer.¹⁶ Colorectal cancer can be prevented by removing precancerous polyps or abnormal growths, which can be identified during screenings, such as sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy.

No Health Care Coverage

Uninsured adults are less likely than insured adults

Percentage of Alaska Adults Not Receiving Preventive Services, Alaska (2016[^] or 2017^{*5})



to receive preventive services or screenings, such as mammograms, pap smears, or prostate screening. Inadequate prevention and screening increase the likelihood of preventable illness, missed diagnoses, and delays in treatment.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

Healthy Lives for all Alaskans

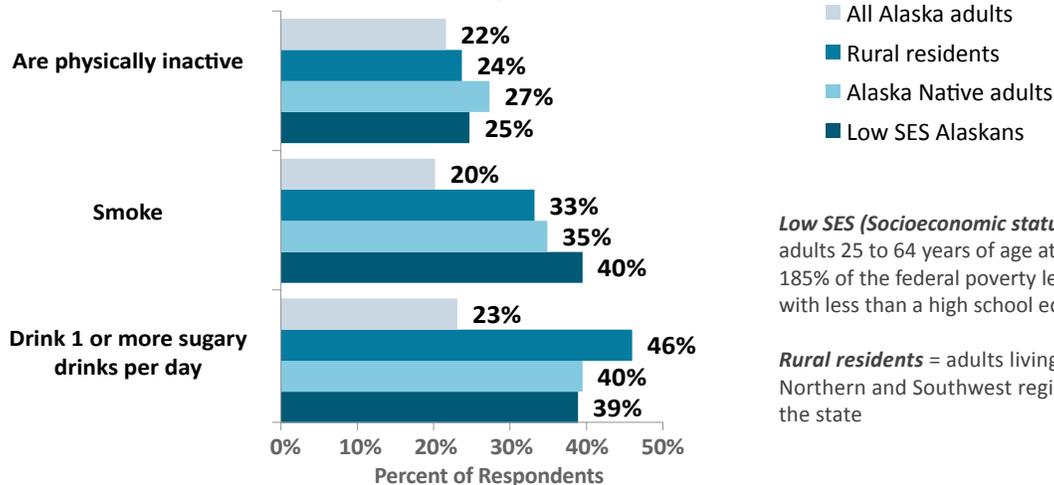
Health begins where we live, learn, work and play—long before we need medical care.

Health starts long before illness in Alaskans' homes, schools, and jobs. Public health professionals must focus on key factors that contribute to unhealthy behaviors and illness, such as poverty and a lack of education, to ensure all Alaskans have a chance to live a healthy life.²⁰

Some groups of Alaskans are more likely to get sick or die from a chronic disease. For example:

- In 2017, Alaska Native people were 1.6 times to 2.7 times more likely than their white peers to die from chronic lower respiratory disease, stroke, heart disease, or cancer.¹
- Alaskans living in the Lake and Peninsula and North Slope boroughs, as well as in the Yukon-Koyukuk and Nome census areas of Alaska are more likely to die from cancer than are those living in other parts of Alaska.²¹

Factors that Increase the Chance of Developing Chronic Diseases, All Alaska Adults, Select Populations (2017)⁵



Low SES (Socioeconomic status) = adults 25 to 64 years of age at or below 185% of the federal poverty level OR with less than a high school education

Rural residents = adults living in the Northern and Southwest regions of the state

What can we do?

Community partners and public health professionals



- Choose solutions and actions that specifically improve the health of vulnerable groups and result in overall population health improvements, including:
 - providing smoke-free workplaces.
 - enhancing the availability of parks and walking trails that support physical activity in a safe way.
 - ensuring all foods and beverages for sale at schools are nutritious and promote health.
 - offering all students quality health and physical education in schools.
 - supporting early childhood education and programming.
 - providing care in schools and health care settings that accounts for violence and trauma children may have experienced.

Individuals



- Take an active role in your health and your family's health by being physically active, eating a healthy diet, avoiding tobacco use, and limiting screen time that is not work- or school-related to no more than two hours per day.
- Ask your health care provider about recommended screenings and services.
- If you use tobacco, call [Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line](#) to get free, confidential help quitting: **(1-800-QUIT-NOW / 1-800-784-8669)**.²²
- If you have diabetes or prediabetes, join a program to help you [prevent or manage diabetes](#).²³

Health care providers



- Ask and advise patients about physical activity, sugary drink consumption, and tobacco use.
- Refer patients to appropriate preventive services.

Resources



- For additional resources to improve chronic disease prevention and management, visit the Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at www.dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic.

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