

Alaska Chronic Disease Facts: 2020 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 2018 were (1) lung, (2) colorectal, (3) pancreas, and (4) breast.¹
- The most commonly **diagnosed cancers** in Alaska in 2017 were (1) breast, (2) lung, (3) prostate, and (4) colorectal. These four cancers accounted for 49% of all cancer cases in Alaska.²
- In 2018, heart disease accounted for 18% of deaths and stroke accounted for 5% in Alaska.¹
- Type 2 diabetes decreases life expectancy by up to 8 years.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 over 25 years, the percentage of adult Alaskans with obesity has continued to rise.⁵ Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating contribute to overweight, obesity, and a number of chronic diseases, including some cancers, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.^{7,8} 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 reason applicants for military service are disqualified.⁹

Tobacco

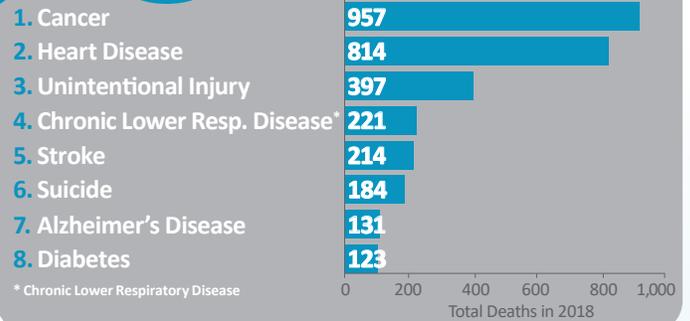
Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the United States, and smoking has been

Preventive Health Services

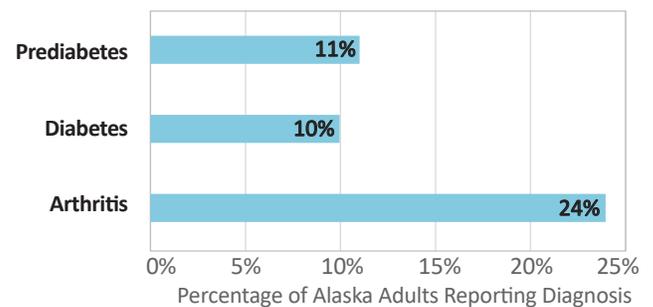
Access to health care impacts everything from prevention of disease and disability, to quality of life, to life expectancy. Limited access can reduce the possibility of receiving preventive health care,

8

Most Common Causes of Death in Alaska in 2018¹

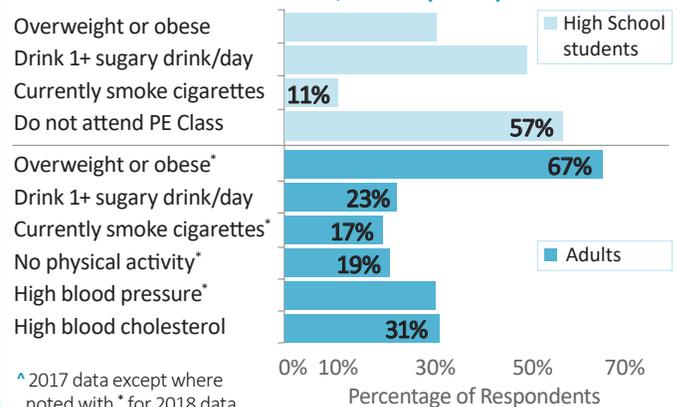


Alaska Adults with Select Chronic Conditions (2018)⁵



causally linked to diseases in nearly all organs of the body.¹⁰ In Alaska, **smoking results in an estimated 700 deaths and costs \$836 million in direct medical expenses and lost earnings** due to those deaths every year.¹¹

Factors that Increase the Chance of Developing Chronic Diseases, Alaska (2017)^{5,12}



including routine disease screening and immunizations. Alaskans' access to health care depends on many things, including whether they have a regular health care provider with whom they can communicate and

Alaska Chronic Disease Facts: 2020 Brief Report



trust, whether they have transportation to get to their provider, and whether they have health insurance. Even those who do have insurance may face limitations in the services they can access, in part due to reductions in reimbursement rates.¹³

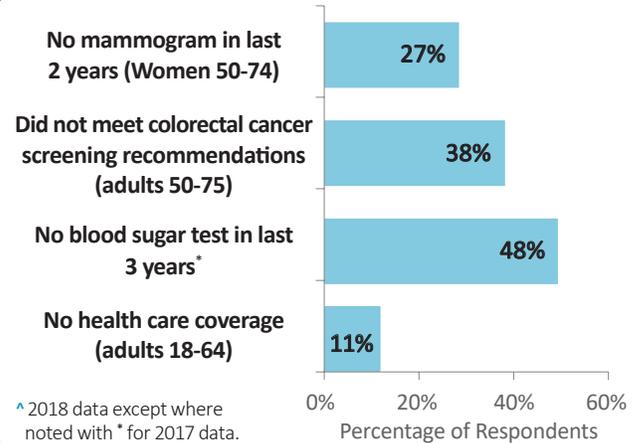
Early Detection

Uncontrolled blood sugar increases the risks for heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, and amputation.¹⁴ Screening for lung, breast, colorectal, and cervical cancer has been shown to either lower your chances of dying from that cancer or prevent that cancer altogether.¹⁵⁻¹⁸

No Health Care Coverage

Uninsured adults have less access to recommended care, receive poorer quality of care, and experience worse health outcomes than insured adults do.¹⁹

Percentage of Alaska Adults Not Receiving Preventive Services, Alaska (2018*)⁵



Healthy Lives for all Alaskans

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

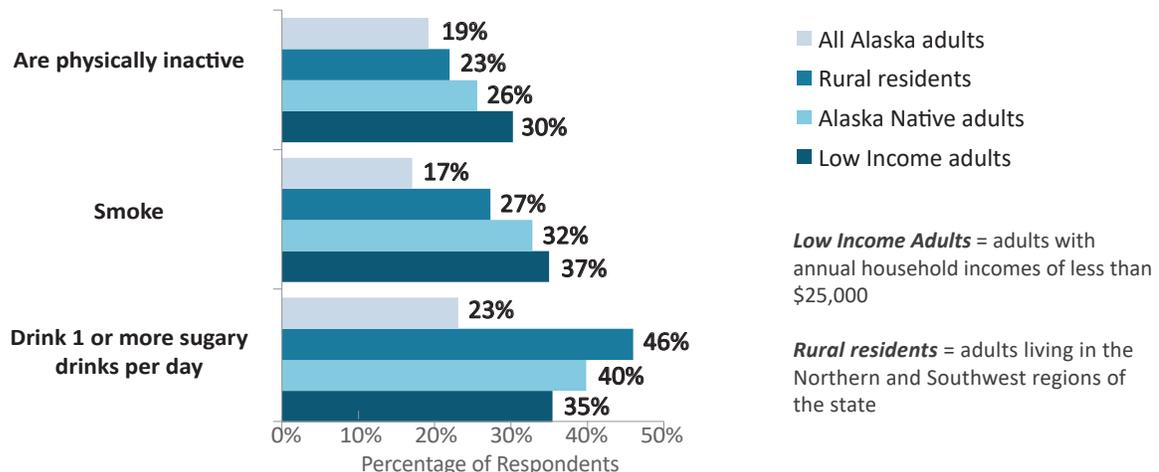
Health starts—long before illness—in Alaskans’ homes, schools, and jobs. Public health professionals must focus on upstream factors that contribute to unhealthy behaviors and illness, such as poverty²⁰ and adverse childhood experiences,²¹ to ensure all Alaskans have a chance to live a healthy life.

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

- In 2018, Alaska Native people were 1.4 times to 2.3 times more likely than their white peers to die from chronic lower respiratory disease, stroke, heart disease, or cancer (occurring anywhere in the body).²²
- In 2014-2018, Alaskans living in the North Slope borough, the Lake and Peninsula borough, the Yukon-Koyukuk (YK) census area^a, Nome census area, and Dillingham had the highest death rates from cancer compared to other parts of Alaska.²²

^aYK rates are based on less than 20 people and may not be statistically reliable.

Factors that Increase the Chance of Developing Chronic Diseases, All Alaska Adults, Select Populations (2018)⁵



What can we do?

Community partners and public health professionals



- Make the healthy choice the easier choice. Choose solutions and actions that improve the health of all Alaskans and in particular groups who face increased chances of getting sick or dying from a chronic disease. For example:
 - Provide smokefree workplaces.
 - Enhance the routes between everyday destinations such as schools, parks, and worksites to support physical activity.
 - Ensure all foods and beverages for sale at schools and worksites are nutritious and promote health.
 - Offer all students quality health and physical education in schools.
 - Support physical activity and good nutrition in early childhood education and programming.

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 cutting out sugary drinks.
- 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).
- If you have diabetes or prediabetes, join a program to help you [prevent or manage diabetes](#).

Health care providers



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



Alaska Chronic Disease Facts: 2020 Brief Report

References

- 1 State of Alaska, Division of Public Health, Health Analytics & Vital Records. Alaska Vital Statistics 2018 Annual Report. October 2019. Available at: http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/VitalStatistics_Annualreport_2018.pdf. Accessed December 6, 2019.
- 2 Alaska Cancer Registry, Health Analytics and Vital Records Section.
- 3 Rosenquist KJ, Fox CS. Mortality trends in type 2 diabetes. Chapter 26 in *Diabetes in America*, 3rd ed. Cowie CC, Casagrande SS, Menke A, Cissell MA et al., Eds. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, NIH Pub No. 17-1468, 2017:36-1—36-14.
- 4 National Health Interview Survey, 2013-2015.
- 5 Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.
- 6 Ford ES, Bergmann MM, Kroger J, Schienkiewitz A, Weikert C, Boeing H. Healthy living is the best revenge. Findings from the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition-Potsdam Study. *Arch Intern Med* 2009;169(15):1355-1362.
- 7 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018.
- 8 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at: <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines>.
- 9 Accession Medical Standards Analysis & Research Activity 2017 Annual Report. Silver Spring, MD: Walter Reed Army Institute of Research; 2017. https://www.amsara.amedd.army.mil/Documents/AMSARA_2017_Report/AMSARA_AR_2017.pdf.
- 10 U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta: USDHHS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014.
- 11 Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Program. *Alaska Tobacco Facts – 2019 Update*. Anchorage, Alaska: Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Div. of Public Health, Alaska Dept. of Health and Social Services; January, 2020. http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Documents/Tobacco/PDF/2019_AKTobaccoFacts.pdf
- 12 Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.
- 13 Frazier R, Foster M. How hard is it for Alaska's Medicare patients to find family doctors? UA Research Summary 14. Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, 2009. https://iseralaska.org/static/legacy_publication_links/2010_06-ImprovingHealthCareAccessforOlderAlaskans.pdf.
- 14 Cowie CC, Casagrande SS, Menke A, et al., eds. *Diabetes in America*, 3rd ed. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, NIH Pub No. 17-1468, 2017.
- 15 Final Recommendation Statement: Breast Cancer: Screening. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. May 2019. <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Document/RecommendationStatementFinal/breast-cancer-screening1>.
- 16 Final Update Summary: Cervical Cancer: Screening. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. August 2018. <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Document/UpdateSummaryFinal/cervical-cancer-screening2>
- 17 Final Update Summary: Lung Cancer: Screening. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. July 2015. <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Document/UpdateSummaryFinal/lung-cancer-screening>
- 18 Final Update Summary: Colorectal Cancer: Screening. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. June 2016. <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Document/RecommendationStatementFinal/colorectal-cancer-screening2>.
- 19 McWilliams JM. Health consequences of uninsurance among adults in the United States: recent evidence and implications. *Milbank Q*. 2009;87(2):443-494. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0009.2009.00564.x
- 20 Braveman PA, Egerter SA, Mockenhaupt RE. Broadening the focus. The need to address the social determinants of health. *Am J Prev Med* 2011;40(1S1):S4-S18.
- 21 Merrick MT, Ford DC, Ports KA, et al. Vital Signs: Estimated proportion of adult health problems attributable to adverse childhood experiences and implications for prevention – 25 states, 2015 – 2017. *MMWR* 2019;68(44):999-1005.
- 22 Alaska Vital Statistics (2013-2017) Health Analytics and Vital Records Section.

Publication date: January 2020