

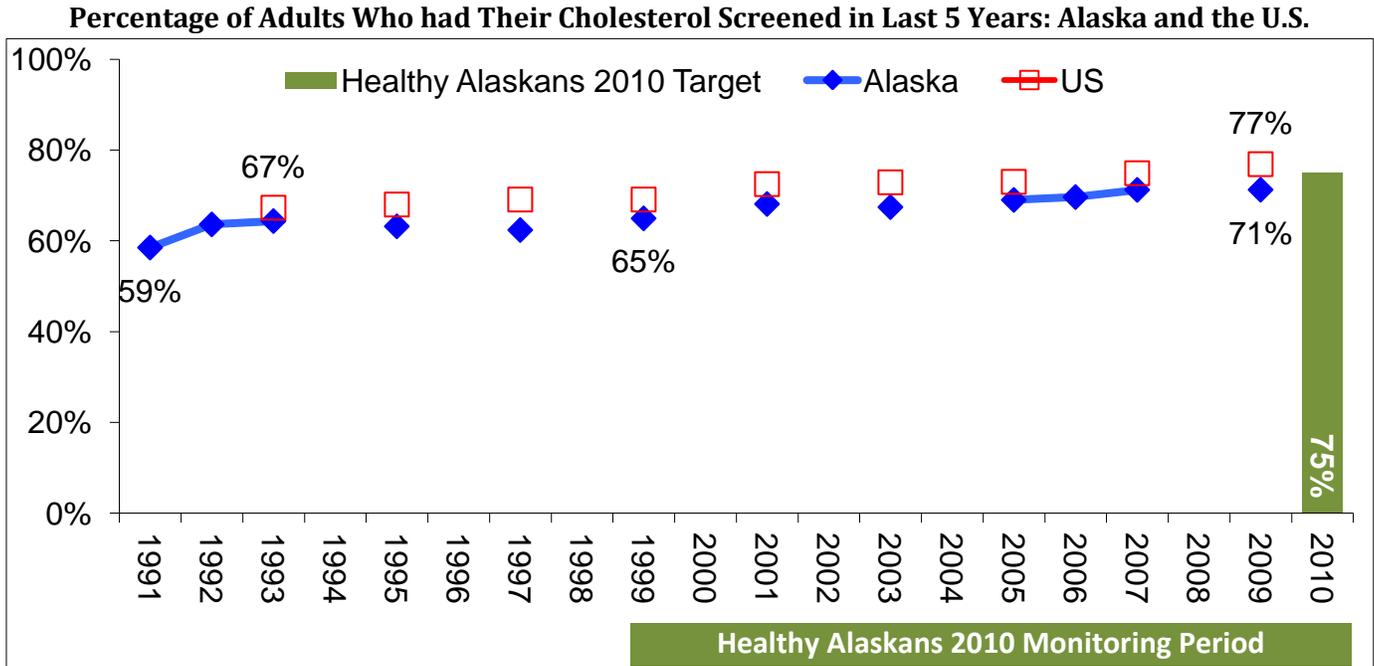
# Alaska Health Status Indicators

## Indicator: *Adult Cholesterol Screening*

### Why is this important?

Cholesterol a fatty, waxy substance found in all cells, is made by the liver and intestine and is acquired from foods. Cholesterol is necessary for proper cell function, but too much may lead to cardiovascular disease. Blood transports cholesterol particles through the body by attaching to high- or low-density lipoproteins. High-density lipoproteins (HDL) carry cholesterol to the liver, then eventually out of the body. High HDL levels are considered an indicator of good cardiovascular health as it acts like a scrubber reducing cholesterol levels. Blood carries low-density lipoproteins (LDL) throughout the body. When blood levels are too high, LDL particles can accumulate on the walls of arteries, beginning a process that can eventually lead to obstruction of blood flow in that vessel. LDL is considered the “bad” cholesterol.<sup>1</sup> Blood cholesterol screening determines whether a person has optimal levels of HDL and LDL.<sup>2</sup> Cholesterol screening is an important tool in determining a person’s risk for cardiovascular disease.

### How are we doing?



This indicator had been measured in odd years since 1991, as well as in 1992 and 2006. The percentage of Alaska adults who have had their blood cholesterol levels screened in the prior 5 years has increased over the past two decades from 59% in 1991 to 71% in 2009.

#### ❖ How is Alaska Doing Relative to the *Healthy Alaskans 2010 Target*?

The *Healthy Alaskans 2010* target for the prevalence of screening (in the past 5 years) for high cholesterol is 75% or higher. The percentage of Alaska adults who have had recent (within 5 years) blood cholesterol screening increased from 65% to 71% during the *Healthy Alaskans 2010* monitoring period. **The *Healthy Alaskans 2010* target of 75% has not been met.**

#### ❖ How does AK compare with the US?

The Alaska cholesterol screening rate is consistently slightly lower than the US rate.

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## ❖ How are different populations affected?

Alaska Natives (60%) and residents of rural Alaska (53%) are less likely to have had their cholesterol screened than non-Natives (73%) or residents of Alaska's other regions (68% to 75%), respectively. Unemployed Alaskans (52%) are less likely to have been screened than those having other work status (72% to 82%). Alaskans with household incomes below the poverty threshold (42%) are less likely to be screened than are those meeting 200% or more of the poverty threshold (78%). Cholesterol screening also increases with education level, from 56% for those with less than a high school education to 85% among college graduates. (Source: 2009 BRFSS)

## What is the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services doing to improve this indicator?

In collaboration with partners in the Take Heart Alaska Coalition<sup>3</sup>, the Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program implements Alaska's Cardiovascular Health Plan. Program activities include increasing the number of health care providers who are aware of and use current blood pressure guidelines. The guidelines are described in the seventh report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure. The Program tracks blood pressure treatment through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Future activities include working with a subgroup within the National Association of Chronic Disease Director's Cardiovascular Health Council specializing in physician adherence to hypertension protocols. The program is also researching the need for and use of establishing a cardiovascular disease registry which would potentially track prescription and use of hypertension medication. Additional information on current hypertension prevention and control efforts in Alaska is available at: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/chp/>.

## Indicator Definition and Notes

Percentage of adults aged 18 years and older who answer:

- "Yes" to the following question: *Blood cholesterol is a fatty substance found in the blood. Have you ever had your blood cholesterol checked?*, and
- "Within the past year", "Within the past 2 years", or "Within the past 5 years" to the following question: *About how long has it been since you last had your blood cholesterol checked?*

## Data Sources

Alaska: Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services; US: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Alaska data were obtained from the Standard AK BRFSS from 1991 through 1993, and in odd years from 1995 through 2003, 2007 and 2009; Alaska data were obtained from the Standard and Supplemental AK BRFSS surveys combined in 2005, and from the Supplemental only in 2006. The Supplemental BRFSS survey is conducted using identical methodology as the Standard BRFSS and allows a doubling of the BRFSS sample size for those measures included on both surveys.

## References

1. The Burden of Heart Disease and Stroke in Alaska: Mortality, Morbidity, and Risk Factors, available at: [http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/chp/pubs/burden\\_Dec09.pdf](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/chp/pubs/burden_Dec09.pdf)
2. National Institutes of Health. ATP III Guidelines At-A-Glance Quick Desk Reference. NIH Publication No. 01-3305. May 2001. Available at: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/cholesterol/atglance.pdf>
3. Take Heart Alaska: [www.takeheart.alaska.gov](http://www.takeheart.alaska.gov)



Available at: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/>

