



Data Book

Prepared by Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER)
University of Alaska Anchorage



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Acknowledgments

DEDICATION

This year's *Kids Count Alaska Data Book* is dedicated to Joan Hurst, who devoted much of her life to making life better and safer for Alaska's children. She died in 2003.

As the first executive director of Camp Fire USA in Alaska, she orchestrated the creation of the agency's first licensed before- and after-school program here. She helped persuade the Alaska Legislature to establish a program to help low-income families pay for child-care, and she advocated for better training for child care workers long before others recognized that need. She helped develop licensing regulations for child-care facilities.

With the help of volunteers, she built what is now the only nationally-accredited resident camp for children in Alaska. It is on Kenai Lake in Southcentral Alaska, and it helps children learn how to be leaders and to study the natural environment at the same time.

It was through her initiative that a water-safety program for children in rural Alaska was established in the 1960s; that program continues to teach 1,000 children in Alaska's remote villages to swim every summer.

The list goes on: tens of thousands of Alaska children and families have benefited from her commitment to children. Alaska will miss her.

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Kids Count is a nationwide program of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The foundation produces a national data book each year, detailing the condition of America's children. It also sponsors Kids Count programs in all 50 states. Feel free to copy, distribute, or otherwise use information from the Kids Count Alaska Data Book, citing the source as:

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THIS BOOK

For several years now, we at Kids Count Alaska have used the annual data book not only to describe how Alaska's children are doing, but also to explain something about Alaska and about life here. This year, the introductory page of each of the five indicator sections features a story, with an illustration, that puts a personal face on some aspect of Alaska's history.

As most Americans know—and as the map on the facing page highlights—Alaska's history since it became a U.S. possession has been dominated by periodic resource developments. Fur, salmon, gold, copper, and most recently—and most spectacularly—oil have shaped the state's economic history. But the history we highlight in our illustrations is not about economic development but about ways of life.

The people with the longest history here are of course Alaska Natives, who have made their home here for thousands of years. Storytelling is a crucial part of Native culture, and the cover page of the Economic Well-Being section features an Inupiat story about the “biggest, strongest, swimmingest” mouse ever, told by Tommy Ongtooguk of Northwest Alaska and recalled by his son Paul.

Another thread of Alaska history is homesteading. Homesteading on the last frontier was a dream of many Americans, and homesteading programs were open in Alaska into the 1970s. About 650,000 acres of Alaska's 375 million acres went into private ownership through homesteading and homesite programs.

The cover page of the Infancy section features a homesteading story from Donna Prator, whose parents proved up on a homestead that is now within the city limits of Anchorage but in the 1950s and 1960s was still wilderness.

Before the advent of snowmachines, sled dog teams were common in rural Alaska, and in February 1925 a relay of dog mushers took part in what became famous as the Serum Run from Nenana in the Interior to Nome on the Bering Sea coast. Doctors in Nome faced an outbreak of diphtheria, but had no serum to treat it; doctors in Anchorage had serum but had to get it to Nome fast. They sent it on the Alaska Railroad from Anchorage to Nenana, where the first musher picked it up. In all, 20 mushers carried the serum 675 miles to Nome, in five days—in temperatures as low as 60 degrees below zero and in wind sometimes blasting above 50 miles an hour.

Today some Alaskans still have working dog teams, and dog mushing is a major winter sport in Alaska. The annual 1,100-mile Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race from Anchorage to Nome commemorates the historic serum run. Several mushers who take part in the Iditarod race, including Martin Buser, a four-time champion, promote Alaska's award-winning childhood immunization campaign, “I Did It By Two” (see more in the Highlights section).

And the cover of the Education section features a story of two teenage mushers and a mushing mishap that entangled them as they trained for the Junior Iditarod, a 160-mile race that helps prepare young mushers for the Iditarod itself.

Another means of transportation quickly became—and remains—at the heart of Alaska life: the airplane. The advantages of air travel across the vast stretches of Alaska were immediately obvious; by the 1940s owning and traveling in small airplanes became commonplace in Alaska. Today Alaska has an estimated 14 times as many planes per capita as the U.S. average.

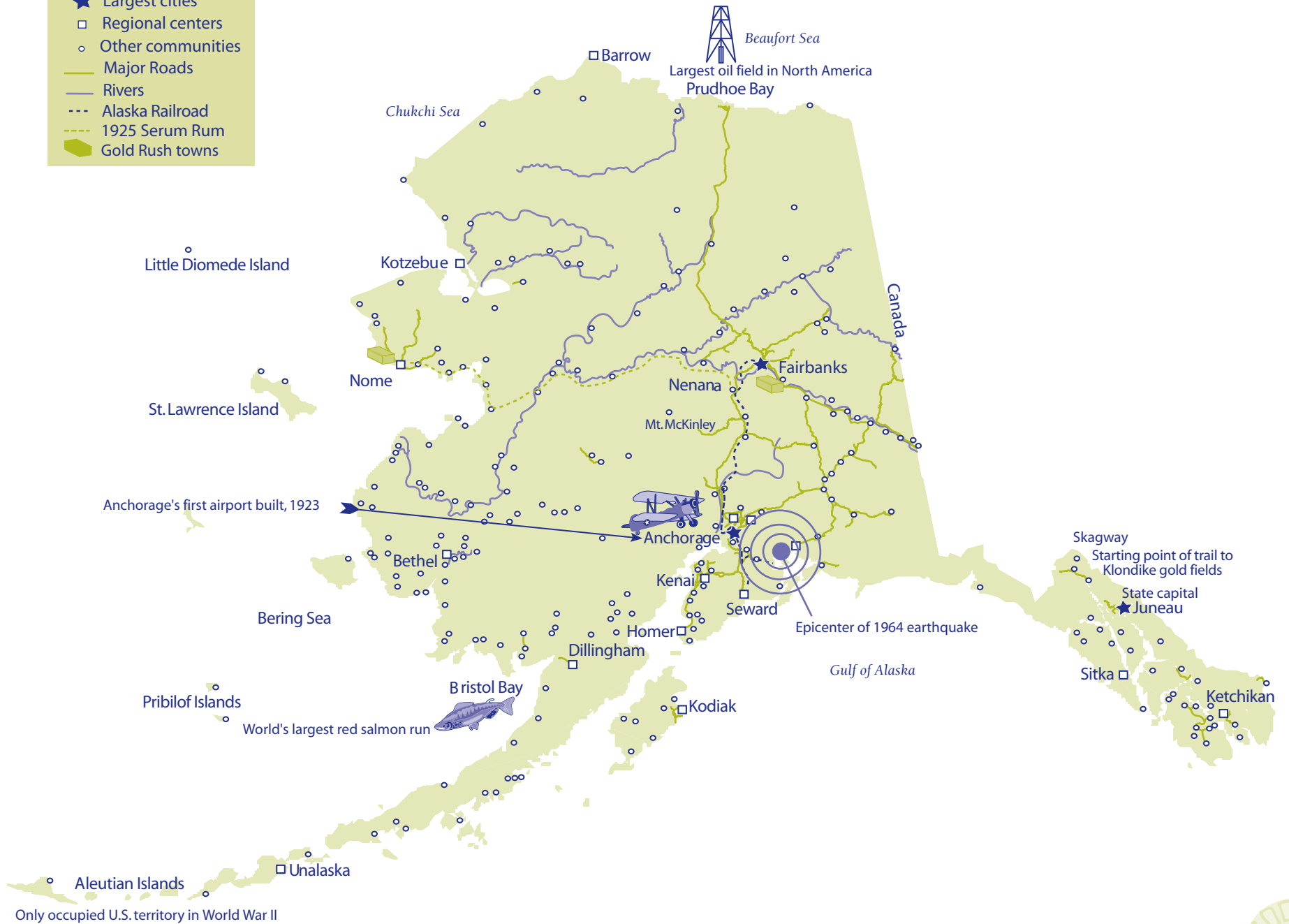
The cover of the Juvenile Crime section features a story from Molly Ridout, a *Kids Count Alaska* researcher, about childhood visits to Homer—at the end of the Kenai Peninsula—when she and her cousins climbed aboard her uncle's small plane and flew off to adventures across Kachemak Bay.

Also famous in Alaska's recent history is the 1964 earthquake—the strongest ever recorded in North America and among the largest ever recorded worldwide. It registered 9.2 on the Richter scale and was centered in Prince William Sound. Anchorage, Seward, Valdez, and other towns in southcentral Alaska lost lives and saw enormous damage that took years to repair—to buildings, harbors, roads, bridges, and rail lines.

It was just days before Easter when the earthquake hit, and the cover of the Children in Danger section features a story from Nancy Sadosky of Seward, who was baking bread and boiling eggs for her children to decorate when the ground began moving. She didn't start worrying until the bowls of egg dye slid off the counter and splashed onto the walls.

The illustrations featured throughout this book are by Clemencia Merrill, ISER's graphic artist—who was originally from Colombia but has lived in Alaska for nearly 20 years.

- ★ Largest cities
- Regional centers
- Other communities
- Major Roads
- Rivers
- - - Alaska Railroad
- - - 1925 Serum Run
- ▣ Gold Rush towns



Introduction (continued)

WHAT IS KIDS COUNT ALASKA?

Kids Count Alaska is part of a nationwide effort, sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to collect and publicize information about children's health, safety, and economic status. We pull together information from many sources and present it all in one place—to help give Alaskans a picture of how the state's children are doing and to provide parents, policy-makers, and others with information they need to improve life for children and families. Our goals include:

- Broadly distributing information about the status of Alaska's children
- Creating an informed public, motivated to help children
- Presenting additional indicators important to Alaska and regional measures when possible

WHO ARE ALASKA'S CHILDREN?

In 2002, Alaska had more than 205,000 children 18 and under. That's nearly a third of Alaska's total population. About 68 percent of children are in married-couple households, another 16 percent in families headed by women, and 7 percent in families headed by men. Almost 5 percent live in households headed by their grandparents.

These living arrangements are based on the census's definition of the "head of household," which usually but not always corresponds with the adult raising the children. For example, we know that grandparents are not raising all the children who live in their households; in many cases, one or both of the children's parents also live in the household. Especially in rural Alaska, extended family households are common.

ALASKA'S CHILDREN BY AGE AND SEX, 1990 AND 2002*

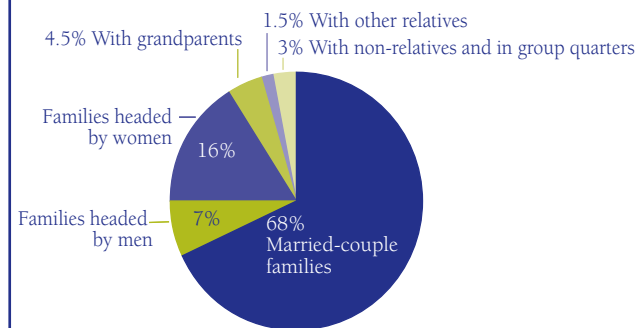
	1990			2002				
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female		
Total Alaska Population	550,043	289,868	260,175	643,786	331,332	312,454		
Children by Age	Number	Percent		Number	Percent			
Under 1	11,963	6.6%	6,109	5,854	10,114	4.9%	5,169	4,945
1-4	44,014	24.5%	22,616	21,398	41,190	20.1%	21,196	19,994
5-9	51,508	28.6%	26,543	24,965	52,471	25.5%	26,719	25,752
10-14	42,939	23.9%	22,333	20,606	58,306	28.4%	29,842	28,464
15	7,652	4.3%	4,021	3,631	11,139	5.4%	5,725	5,414
16	7,341	4.1%	3,786	3,555	11,246	5.5%	5,840	5,406
17	7,453	4.1%	3,887	3,566	10,960	5.3%	5,631	5,329
18	7,069	3.9%	3,834	3,235	10,057	4.9%	5,196	4,861
Total 18 and under	179,939	100%	93,129	86,810	205,483	100%	105,318	100,165

*Alaska Department of Labor estimates, July 2002

Half the state's children live in Anchorage and the adjoining Mat-Su Borough, the state's most urban areas (although parts of the borough are still quite rural). Nearly another quarter live in the Gulf Coast and Southeast regions, with many fishing communities and the state capital at Juneau. The remaining one quarter of Alaska's children live mostly in small communities scattered across the vast expanses of the Interior, Northern, and Southwest regions; the exception is Fairbanks, Alaska's second largest city, which is in the Interior.

About 63 percent of Alaska's children are White and 25 percent Alaska Native. Black and Asian children each make up about 4 percent. White children are the majority in all regions except the Northern and Southwest areas, where nearly 90 percent are Native.

Living Arrangements of Alaska Children, 2000



Total children under 18: 190,717

Note: The composition of American households is complex. These categories are determined based on head of households. For example, a single mother and her children living in a home owned by her father would be included in the "living with grandparents" category. Likewise, not all children living in families headed by men are children being raised by their fathers alone.

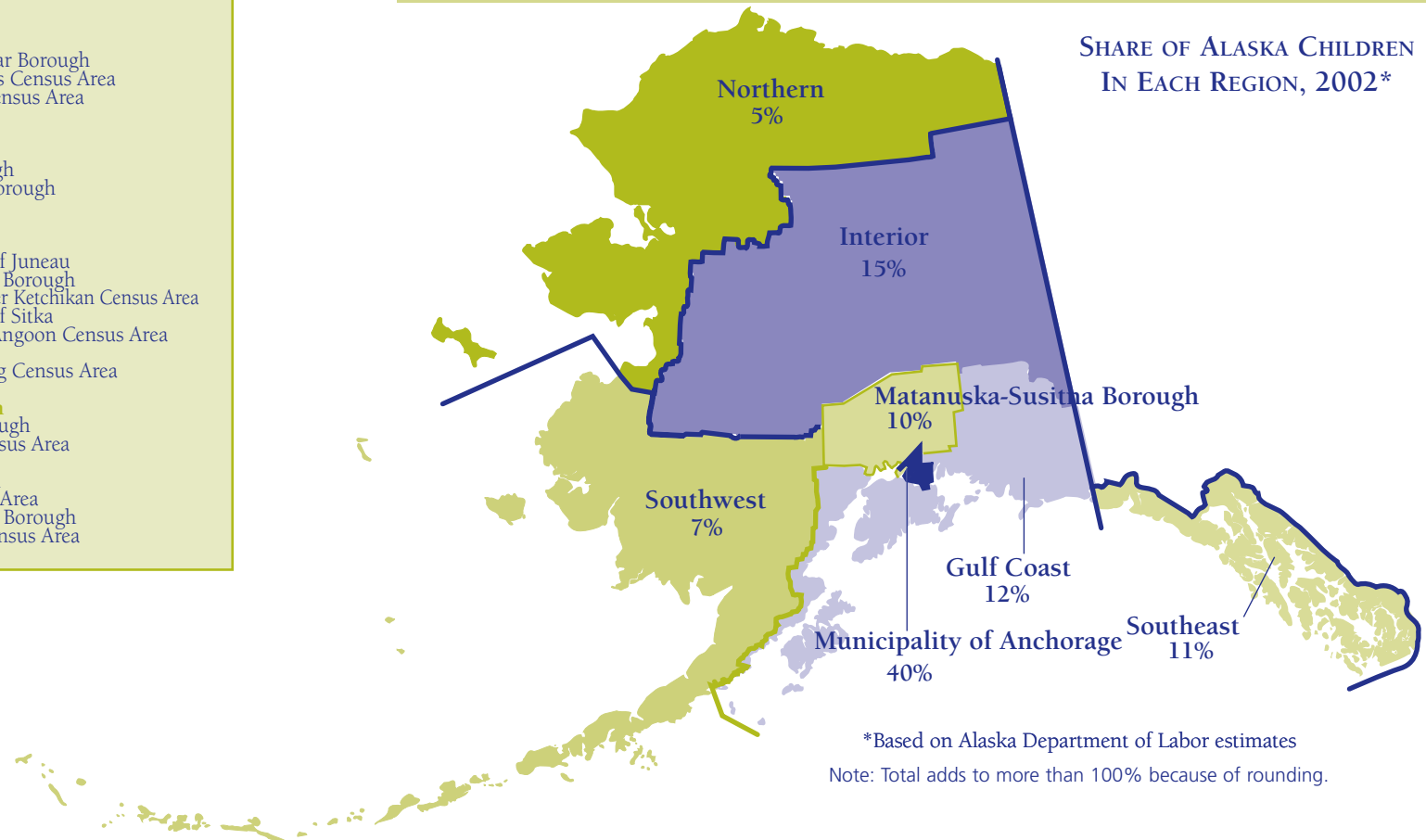
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- Boroughs and Census Areas, by Region**
- **Municipality of Anchorage**
 - **Matanuska-Susitna Borough**
 - **Gulf Coast Region**
Kenai Peninsula Borough
Kodiak Island Borough
Valdez-Cordova Census Area
 - **Interior Region**
Denali Borough
Fairbanks North Star Borough
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area
 - **Northern Region**
Nome Census Area
North Slope Borough
Northwest Arctic Borough
 - **Southeast Region**
Haines Borough
City and Borough of Juneau
Ketchikan Gateway Borough
Prince of Wales/Outer Ketchikan Census Area
City and Borough of Sitka
Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon Census Area
Yakutat Borough
Wrangell-Petersburg Census Area
 - **Southwest Region**
Aleutians East Borough
Aleutians West Census Area
Bethel Census Area
Bristol Bay Borough
Dillingham Census Area
Lake and Peninsula Borough
Wade Hampton Census Area

RACIAL COMPOSITION OF CHILDREN, (19 AND UNDER) BY REGION, 2000
(In Percentages)

	White	Alaska Native ^a	Black	Asian	NH/PI ^b	Mixed Race ^c
Anchorage	67.3	13.8	7.2	5.9	1.5	4.4
Mat-Su	85.0	11.7	0.7	0.6	0.2	1.9
Gulf Coast	77.2	15.9	0.5	4.3	0.4	1.7
Interior	70.1	18.7	6.3	1.5	0.3	3.2
Northern	8.1	89.0	0.2	1.6	0.3	0.7
Southeast	63.4	30.0	0.5	3.6	0.4	2.1
Southwest	10.1	87.9	0.2	1.3	0.1	0.5
Alaska	63.2	25.3	4.1	3.7	0.8	2.9

^aIncludes Native alone or in combination with other races. ^bNative Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders
^cChildren of Native and another race are included in "Alaska Native."
Source: 2000 U.S. census, adjusted by Alaska Department of Labor for errors in age imputation



Introduction (continued)

How Does Alaska Compare With U.S.?

The table on the facing page, showing Alaska's rank on national Kids Count indicators in 2001, shows a mostly grim picture for Alaska. Among all the states, Alaska did have nearly the smallest share of babies with low birth weight and among the lowest teen birth rates.

But we also had the highest rate of teen violent death and nearly the highest child death rate. Only a handful of states had higher shares of single-parent families; of children with no parent working full-time; and of teenagers not working and not going to school. Alaska's rate of infant mortality stood far above the national average, as did the rate of teens dropping out of school. Certainly these figures are worrisome. But keep in mind a few points that help put the numbers in context.

- The child death rate here has historically been high—but as we describe later, that rate has declined significantly since the 1980s, due in part to public and private campaigns to reduce accidental deaths. But the rate can still fluctuate sharply, because Alaska's population is small and the number of children who die each year is smaller than in other states. So a relatively small change in the number of deaths can make a big difference in the calculated rate of death. For example, in 1999, Alaska's child death rate was based on 35 deaths and was right about at the national average; in 2001, 50 children died and Alaska's rate was almost the highest in the nation.
- The rate of teen violent death in Alaska has also historically been high, due in part to the same climate and terrain hazards that injure and kill younger children. And

again, the rate is based on relatively small numbers of deaths and can fluctuate sharply from year to year. But a big contributor to teen violent death is also the very high rate of suicide among Alaska Native teenagers, especially boys. From 1992 to 2001, Native teenage boys committed suicide at a rate 5 times that of all Alaska teenagers. As we discuss later, the state is taking steps to fight these suicides.

- Infant mortality has been declining in Alaska for several decades, but it jumped sharply in 2000 and 2001. Again, this rate is based on a relatively small number of deaths; we will need more years of data to determine if this is a new trend or whether the most recent years are an anomaly in the long-term trend.
- Until 2001, Alaska's rate of high-school dropouts had been below the national average for more than a decade. What caused the big jump in 2001 is not yet clear, but some analysts believe it may be linked to the higher accountability standards the state has established in recent years, including a high-school exit exam.
- Jobs are scarce and unemployment is high in most of rural Alaska, which helps explain why so many Alaska children have parents without full-time work. But for some Alaskans, seasonal work—like commercial fishing—combined with subsistence hunting and fishing, may provide more economic stability than the figures indicate.

INTERPRETING THE INDICATORS

The indicators are presented as either percentages or rates per 1,000 or 100,000. We use percentages for the more common events and

rates per 1,000 or 100,00 for the less common; those bigger bases let us present results in whole numbers rather than fractions.

Also remember that Alaska has only about 205,000 children in total; when you divide them by region, race, or sex, the numbers get much smaller. And, as we've just discussed, rates for many of Alaska's indicators are based on a small number of actual events; the number of events in any given region—especially rural regions—in a year is smaller yet.

To try to minimize chance variations from year to year, we use 5-year averages when calculating regional indicators. But even then, the numbers behind the rates can be very small.

Another potential problem is that some of the indicators are based on samples. Such samples of Alaska's small, geographically-dispersed population are especially subject to error, if they're not accurately drawn and weighted to represent the entire population.

Finally, bear in mind that the indicators don't measure the effectiveness of specific programs; rather, they're broad indications of social conditions.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DATA BOOK

On the next few pages we highlight some of the data from this book. Then we present five sections of indicators: Infancy, Economic Well-Being, Education, Children in Danger, and Juvenile Crime.

Notes for the indicators are at the end of each section. Several sections also include descriptions of special programs or other information that helps shed light on the indicator.

2001 NATIONAL KIDS COUNT INDICATORS, U.S. AVERAGE AND ALASKA

	U.S. Rate	U.S. No. of Cases	Alaska Rate	Alaska No. of Cases	Alaska Rank in U.S.
Alaska Better Than National Average					
Percentage of babies with low birth weight	7.7%	308,747	5.7%	566	2nd
Percentage of children living in poverty ^a	16%	11,587,100	12%	21,100	9th
Teen birth rate (per 1,000 girls 15-17) ^b	25	145,324	19	302	16th
Alaska Worse Than National Average					
Percentage of teens (ages 16-19) who drop out of school	9%	1,488,000	11%	4,000	35th
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) ^c	6.8	27,568	8.1	81	39th
Percentage of teens not in school and not working	8%	1,355,000	11%	4,000	41st
Percentage of single-parent families	28%	9,679,000	31%	26,000	43rd
Percentage of children with no parent working full-time ^d	25%	17,963,000	29%	56,000	43rd
Child death rate (per 100,000 children 1-14) ^c	22	12,202	34	50	49th
Teen violent death rate (per 100,000 teens 15-19) ^c	50	10,156	75	41	50th

^a Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty threshold figures, which are not adjusted for Alaska's higher living costs and may underestimate poverty in Alaska.

^b Before 1993, this indicator measured the rate of births to teenage girls 15-19. The Alaska regional figures, which appear later in this book, are based on that previous definition.

^c These rates are based on small numbers of deaths and can therefore fluctuate sharply from year to year.

^d The national *Kids Count* program added this indicator in its 1999 data book. We have not calculated regional breakdowns for Alaska, because the definition of "full-time employment" does not take into account different employment patterns in rural Alaska.

Note: Alaska figures in this table may differ from later figures in the regional graphs. The figures above are from the national *Kids Count* program; our regional figures may be based on different years and are sometimes measured differently.

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book*, 2004



Highlights

Here we highlight a bit of the information we found in looking at many sources for this year's data book. Later sections of the book provide much more detail about the well-being of Alaska's children.

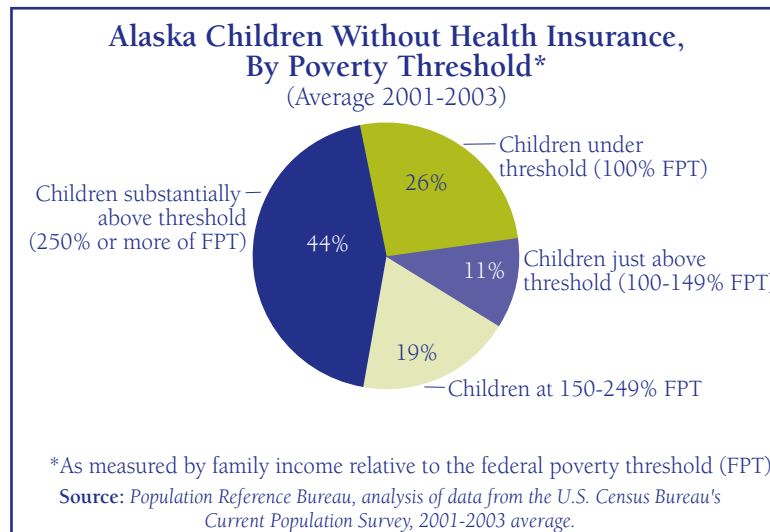
THOUSANDS COULD QUALIFY FOR DENALI KIDCARE

As many as 12,000 more children in Alaska could qualify for a government-funded program that provides health care coverage for children without health insurance, according to a non-profit group working to let more Alaskans know about the program.

Denali KidCare is an extension of Medicaid for children from uninsured families whose income is somewhat too high to qualify them for Medicaid. In 2003, children whose family income was less than 175 percent of the federal poverty level could apply. About 22,000 children were enrolled in the program during 2002, and the estimate of 12,000 additional children who could be eligible is based on U.S. census information about family income.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 27,000 children in Alaska were without health insurance in recent years; that's likely an overestimate, because census data count as "uninsured" Alaska Native children who don't have traditional health insurance but who are eligible for Indian Health Service medical care.

Still, census data make it clear there are thousands of uninsured children from poor and near-poor families who might qualify for Denali KidCare. A quarter of uninsured children have family incomes below the poverty level, and another 11 percent have family incomes of less than 150 percent of the poverty level.



Many families—in Alaska and nationwide—apparently don't apply because they don't know the program exists.

The pie graph above also shows something else about uninsured children in Alaska: nearly half of them come from families whose incomes are considerably above poverty levels. That indicates, as is true across the country, that there are a significant number of American families who can't qualify for Medicaid—because they earn too much—but who also can't afford private health insurance.

RISKY BEHAVIOR DOWN AMONG TEENAGERS

The 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that Alaska high-school students are only about half as likely to use inhalants or smoke cigarettes as they were in 1995, and significantly less likely to drink, to fight, and to have sex without using condoms.

The decline in inhalant use is especially welcome news, since sniffing gasoline fumes has killed a number of teenagers in Alaska Native villages in recent years. Students in Alaska are also now less likely than students nationwide to use inhalants—and to smoke or get into fights.

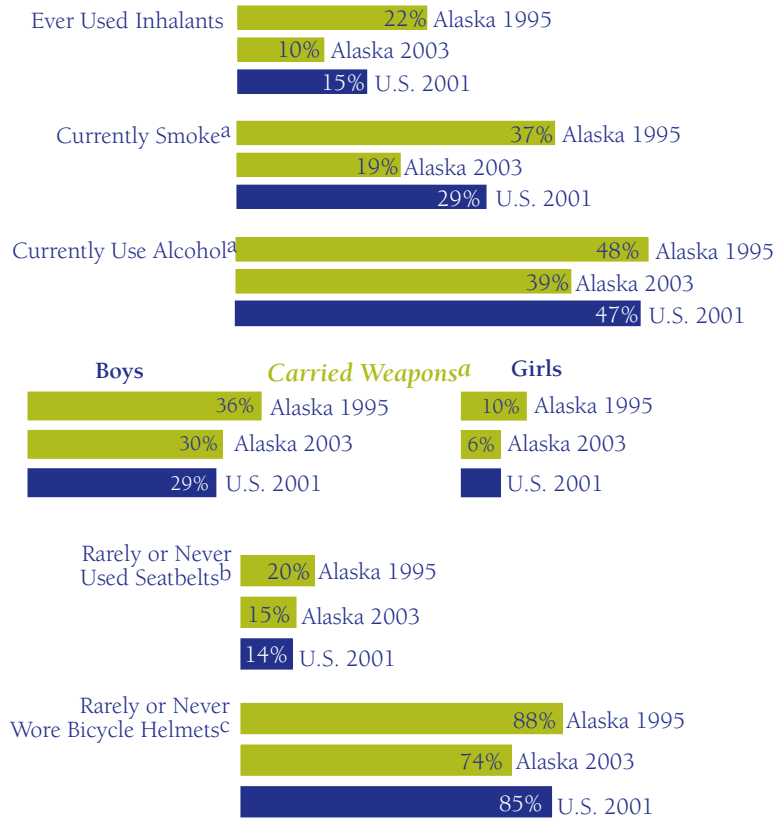
Still, as the figure on the facing page shows, 40 percent of Alaska high-school students still drink, 20 percent smoke cigarettes, and 10 percent use inhalants. Nearly a third of the boys carry weapons at least some-

times. Three quarters of high-school students still don't wear bike helmets and 15 percent don't use seatbelts—but use of helmets and seatbelts is up significantly from 1995 levels.

The youth risk survey is a national effort, sponsored by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Alaska the Department of Health and Social Services administers the survey, which asks high-school students a series of questions about things they do that may risk their health and safety.

On almost all measures, fewer Alaska students reported risky behavior in 2003 than in 1995, the last time this survey was administered in school districts statewide. So the recent news is good, but many high-school students are still putting their health—especially their long-term health—and safety at risk.

Selected Results of 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey



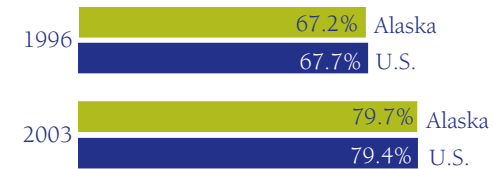
^aWithin 30 days before survey

^bRiding in car driven by someone else. ^cAmong those who rode bicycles in previous year.

Source: Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003

Progress in Immunizations of Children Under Age 3

(Share of Children 19 to 35 Months with all Recommended Immunizations*)



*Four doses of diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis; three polio doses; one measles, mumps, rubella; 3 Hib doses; and three hepatitis B doses.

IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM WINS NATIONAL AWARD

Nearly 80 percent of Alaska children under three had all the recommended immunizations in 2003, up from about 67 percent in 1996. Alaska is now just about at the level of immunizations among children nationwide.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a goal of immunizing 90 percent of American children. The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and other groups are working toward

that national goal, and in 2003 the Vaccinate Alaska Coalition won an award from the National Partnership for Immunization for its "I Did It By TWO!" campaign. The coalition is made up of public and private organizations and individual citizens.

The campaign has enlisted the help of mushers in the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, who wear bibs—and also put jackets on their dogs—to promote public awareness about the vaccination program. The Iditarod race itself commemorates the famous 1925 Serum Run, when mushers raced serum from Nenana to Nome to fight a diphtheria outbreak. See more about I Did it By TWO! at:

www.epi.alaska.gov/immunize



Highlights (continued)

BRINGING CHILDREN WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS HOME

Parents and children's advocacy groups have charged that Alaska's state government sends too many children with mental health problems to treatment facilities outside Alaska. So in 2002 the state Department of Health and Social Services contracted with the Alaska Comprehensive and Specialized Evaluation Services at the University of Alaska Anchorage to assess how the state treats children with mental health problems.

Specifically, the evaluators looked at the share of children treated in Alaska and outside the state; characteristics of children with mental health problems; and gaps in services for these children. Their findings are based on information about roughly 1,900 children under 18 who had at least two recent periods of residential treatment, paid for by Medicaid. The evaluators did interviews, studied case files, and collected information from state databases.

About one quarter of the children in the study had been taken into state custody; three quarters remained in parental custody. The table shows broad characteristics of children who went through Medicaid-funded treatment for mental health or substance abuse problems in recent years.

It's a grim portrait: a third had suspected or diagnosed Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (which is caused when pregnant women drink); a third to a half had been physically or sexually abused or neglected. Abuse levels were highest among children taken into state custody.

The pie graph shows in- and out-of-state residential treatment of the children studied.

- About two thirds of the children who got Medicaid-funded treatment remained in Alaska and the other third were sent outside the state.
- Children who had been taken into state custody were more likely to be kept in Alaska for treatment.

In looking at existing state services for children with mental health problems, the evaluators found, among other things:

- The state needs more treatment facilities. There is heavy use of existing facilities and long waiting lists of children who need treatment.
- The reason children who have been taken into state custody are more likely to be treated in Alaska is that the state Office of Children's Services reserves residential slots for them.
- The state system doesn't provide enough prevention and early-intervention services, especially at the community level.
- State budget cuts have made it harder for agencies to provide services, and policymakers don't pay enough attention to issues affecting children.

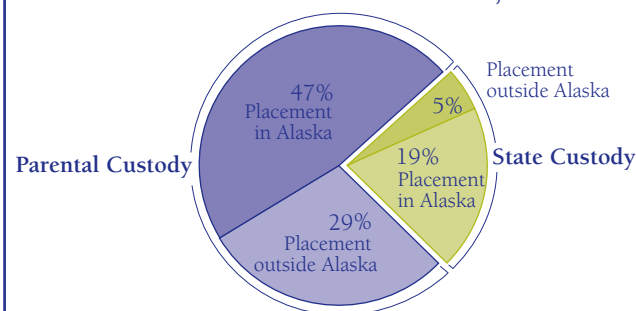
WHO ARE THE CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE?*

- Their average age is 14 or 15
- Nearly 60 percent are boys
- One third have diagnosed or suspected Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder
- About one quarter are in state custody and the rest in parental custody.
- More than half have been physically abused, 40 percent sexually abused, and a third physically neglected. Rates of abuse are much higher among those in state custody.

*Among 1,898 children whose treatment was paid for by Medicaid and who had at least two residential treatments in the two years before the study.

Source: Alaska Comprehensive and Specialized Evaluation Services, UAA, *Children and Youth Needs Assessment: Profiles of Alaska Children and Youth In Need of Care, 2002*

Residential Placement of Alaska Children* (Under 18) With Mental Health or Substance Abuse Problems, FY 2002



*Children whose treatment was paid for by Medicaid. Includes 1,898 children under 18 who had at least two residential placements in 2000 or 2001.

Source: *Children and Youth Needs Assessment: Profiles of Alaska Children and Youth in Need of Care, 2002*



Porcupines in the bathtub were just a part of everyday life for Donna Prator and her family, when Donna was growing up on a homestead outside Anchorage.

Story continued on back of page.



Infancy



It was 1949 when Donna, her older sister Melba, and their parents staked federal homestead land along the Chugach Mountains south of Anchorage. At the time, Anchorage had a population of about 11,000. The Prator homestead was miles from town and high above a narrow dirt road into Anchorage.

The family lived in a wall tent while they built their house and kept their bathtub sheltered under a large spruce tree. They stacked wood alongside the bathtub, so it was handy when they needed to heat water for baths.

One morning six-year-old Donna emerged from the tent to discover that a baby porcupine had climbed the woodpile and fallen into the bathtub. She watched the small porcupine trying to climb out of the tub, then rushed back to the tent and reported to her father, "There's a porcupine tap-dancing in our tub!" Her father used a water bucket to scoop the porcupine out.

Life on the homestead was full of much bigger challenges than porcupines in the bathtub. Just getting into Anchorage for work and school was a major undertaking in the winter, since the Prators maintained their own road to the homestead. Donna can remember when the family shoveled snow for three days, after a combination of a record-breaking snowfall and wind created 11-foot walls of snow.

The Prator family (including two younger children born after 1949) stayed on their homestead until 1970, when Donna's father decided the area had become "too crowded." The family then moved on to a more remote area further south of Anchorage.

Today the former Prator homestead is dotted with houses and is within the Municipality of Anchorage, which has a population close to 270,000.

Areas of federal land in Alaska remained open to homesteading until the 1970s. About 650,000 acres (one quarter of one percent of Alaska's 375 million acres) went into private ownership through homesteading programs.

DEFINITION

The Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics uses the Kessner index to classify prenatal care as adequate, intermediate, or inadequate.¹ Both the intermediate and the inadequate categories are considered “less than adequate” care.

Under this index, pregnant women who see doctors or other medical professionals at least once during their first trimesters, and at least nine times during their entire pregnancies, are classified as having “adequate” prenatal care. Those who see doctors at least once during their first or second trimesters, and at least four more times during their pregnancies, are classified as having “intermediate care.” Those who don’t see doctors at all during the first or second trimesters, or fewer than five times throughout their pregnancies, are considered to have “inadequate” prenatal care.

SIGNIFICANCE

Good prenatal care reduces health problems for mothers and babies. Prenatal visits allow doctors to monitor changes in the health of pregnant women, encourage healthy habits, and determine potential risks to mothers and babies. Women who get prenatal care early in their pregnancies establish a baseline their doctors can use to observe changes over the coming months. Prenatal visits also give doctors the chance to talk to their patients about why they should consider taking folic acid supplements; why they shouldn’t smoke or drink while they’re pregnant; and why they might need specific screening tests.

Public health agencies have long reported that a major benefit of prenatal care is a reduced risk of babies with low birth weight, which is among the leading causes of infant mortality.²

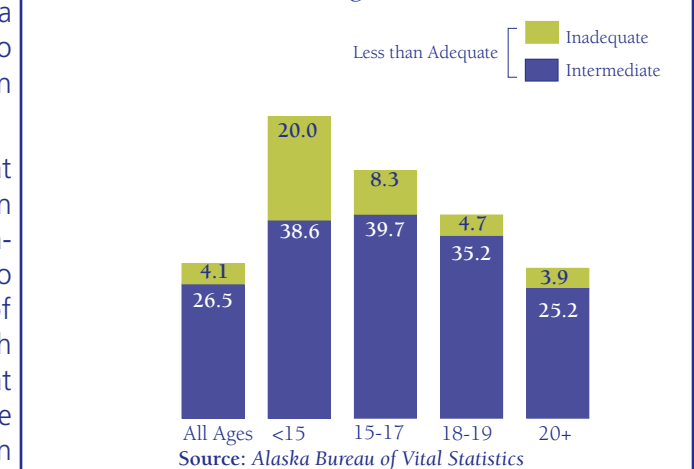
But while no one disputes that prenatal care is a good thing, in recent years there’s been disagreement about how many prenatal visits are necessary and how directly a specific number of visits translates into fewer underweight babies among women with low-risk pregnancies.³

A 1998 study found, for example, that while a growing share of American women made the recommended number of prenatal visits in the 1990s, there had been no corresponding decline in the share of babies born preterm or full-term but with low birth weight.⁴ A 2002 study found that missing visits early in pregnancy could be harmful, but that missing visits later in pregnancy was less likely to be harmful.⁵

Some analysts are now calling for more emphasis on the quality of prenatal care, rather than just the number of visits, in determining what constitutes good prenatal care. For instance, pregnant women who smoke are believed to be responsible for about 20 percent of low-birth-weight babies nationwide.⁶ A recent study found “consistent and precise evidence” that maternal smoking drops when doctors use prenatal visits to warn pregnant women that smoking can harm fetuses.⁷

Researchers also cite the need for more studies that take into account how living conditions, quality of nutrition, weight gain, and other characteristics of pregnant women affect the rate of low-birth-weight babies.⁸

Percentage of Mothers Receiving Less Than Adequate Care, By Age
(5-Year Average, 1997-2001)

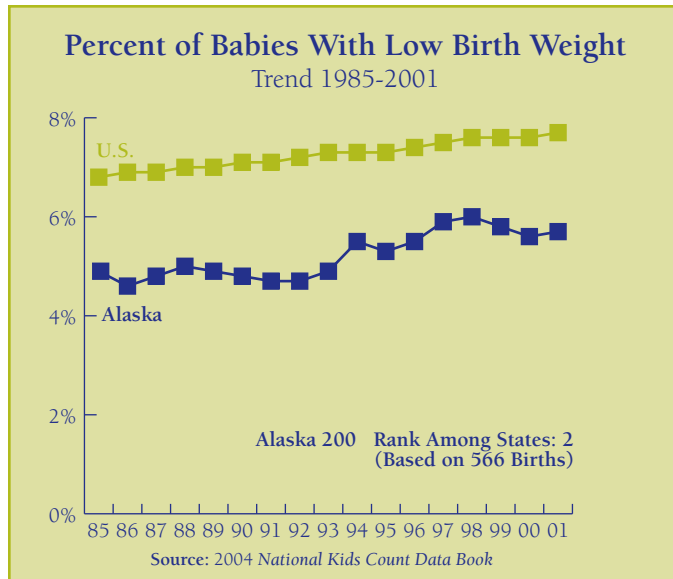


DATA

Nearly 50,000 babies were born in Alaska between 1997 and 2001. Close to 90 percent of those babies were born to mothers over age 20 and the rest to teenage mothers. Most babies were born to White women (65 percent) or Alaska Native women (25 percent).

National statistics show that slightly more pregnant women in Alaska than pregnant women nationwide—4.6 percent, compared with 3.6 percent—get late or no prenatal care.

About 3 in 10 of all Alaska mothers get less than adequate prenatal care, but it is the youngest mothers—like very young mothers nationwide—who are the least likely to get adequate care. Among those who had babies from 1997-2001, nearly half of those 15 to 17, and more than 60 percent of those under 15, failed to see doctors or other medical professionals often enough to meet the Kessner index standard of adequate care.



Other factors that can influence whether babies are born full-term or pre-term include maternal age and race, alcohol and drug use, quality of prenatal care, spacing of births, and infections.

If we could reduce the number of babies born underweight, we would not only save lives, prevent health problems, and reduce the emotional toll on families, we could also cut medical costs. It's estimated that the 307,000 babies born with low birth weight in the U.S. in 2000 will incur medical and other costs totaling \$7.6 billion during their childhood.¹¹

DEFINITION

Infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds (2,500 grams) are classified as having low birth weight. Regional data reflect the mother's place of residence, not the infant's place of birth.

SIGNIFICANCE

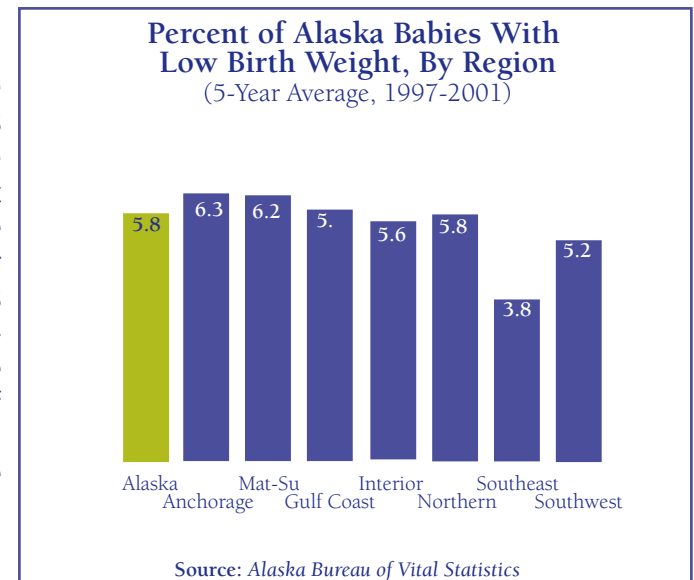
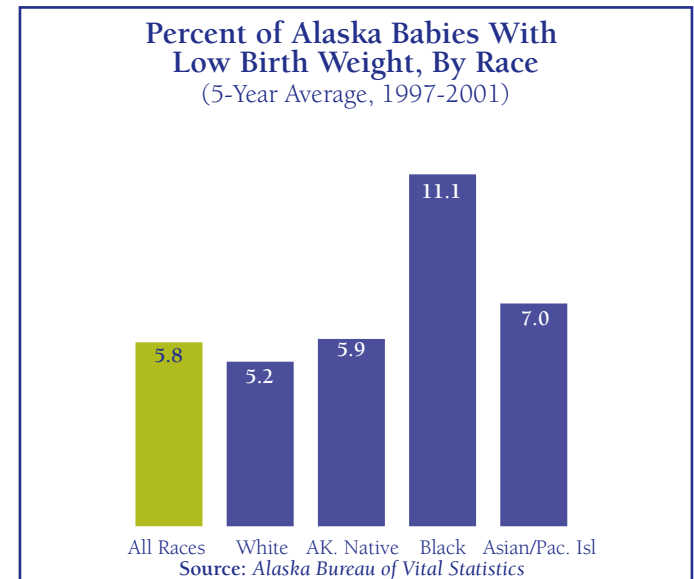
Low birth weight is a leading cause of infant mortality, and most neonatal infant deaths (deaths in the first 28 days) are among low-birth-weight babies. These babies are also more likely to require special services at birth and to have developmental problems. Roughly two thirds are born pre-term.

All the factors contributing to low birth weight aren't understood, but the most widely recognized single cause is preventable: it's smoking. Pregnant women who smoke account for an estimated 20 percent of low-birth-weight babies across the U.S.⁹ In Alaska, 27 percent of teen-age mothers and nearly 19 percent of all mothers smoke while pregnant.¹⁰

DATA

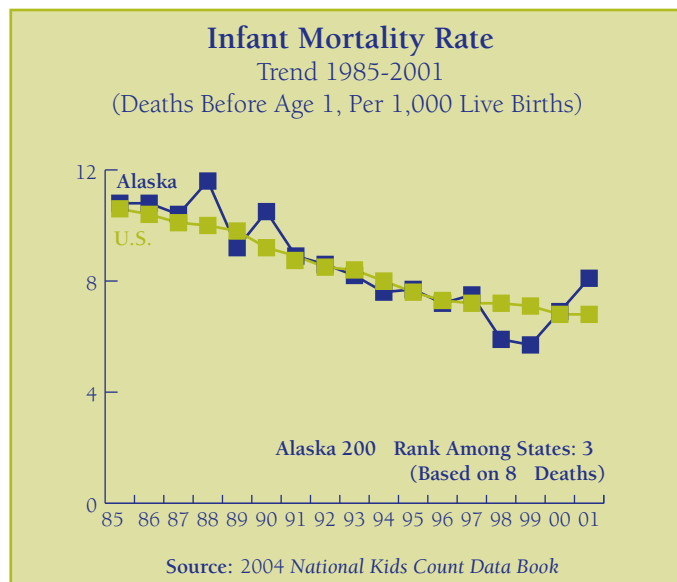
Alaska consistently has among the smallest share of low-birth-weight babies in the nation, and in 2001 only one state (Oregon) had a slightly smaller share. But in both Alaska and the entire U.S., the share of low-birth-weight babies is higher now than it was a decade ago. The causes of this increase are not all clear, but analysts have attributed part of the increase nationwide to growth in the number of twins, triplets, and other multiple births. More than half the babies in multiple births are underweight.¹²

Infants born to Black mothers in Alaska between 1997 and 2001 were nearly twice as likely to be born with low birth weight as babies from other racial groups. (That's also true nationwide; in 2001, 13.1 percent of Black infants were born underweight, compared with 6.8 percent of White babies.¹³)



Regional differences in the share of babies born with low birth weight were fairly slight in recent years, except in Southeast Alaska, where the rate of 3.8 percent was far below that in any other region.

Infant Mortality



DEFINITION

The infant mortality rate is the number of deaths among infants under 1 year, per 1,000 live births. Infant deaths are recorded by place of infant residence, not place of death.

SIGNIFICANCE

The infant mortality rate in a community offers a window on the health of mothers and babies. It indicates, among other things, the availability of adequate food; the quality of housing and sanitation; and the quality and accessibility of health care.

Alaska's infant mortality rate has dropped sharply in recent decades, and an important reason for that improvement is that the mortality rate among Alaska Native infants—which as recently as 1960 was nearly 100 per 1,000 infants—has fallen dramatically with improved health care and living conditions among Alaska Natives.¹⁴

DATA

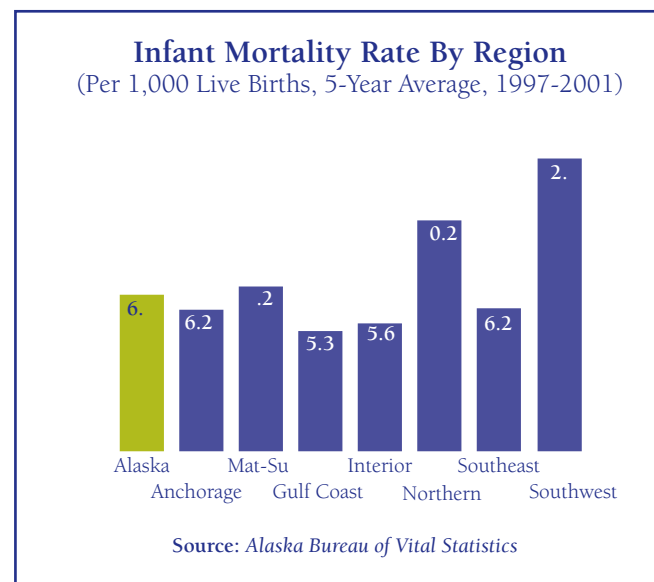
Alaska's infant mortality rate fell 35 percent during the 1990s, and by the end of the decade, Alaska's neonatal mortality rate (deaths within the first 28 days of life) was 3.1 per 1,000—the lowest in the nation.¹⁵

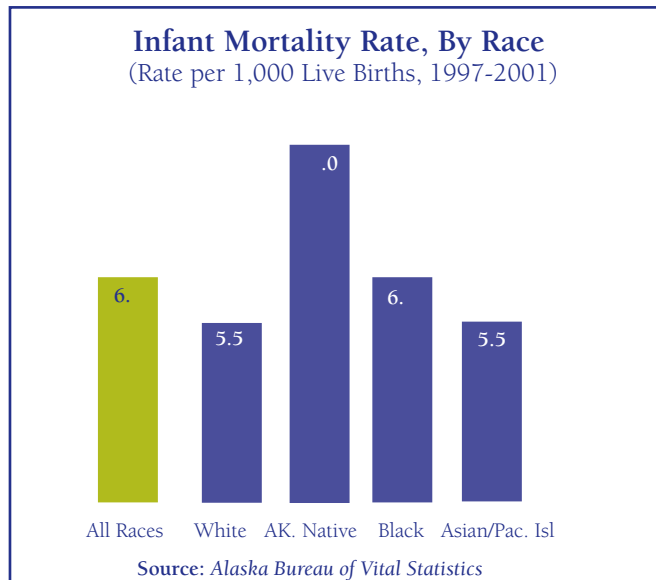
But Alaska's infant mortality rate climbed in 2000 and 2001. At 8.1 deaths per 1,000 births, Alaska's 2001 rate was considerably above the U.S. average of 6.8. We don't know why Alaska's rate went up. But it is based on a small number of deaths—81 in 2001—and a relatively small change in the number of deaths can change the rate substantially.

The most recent figures may be just an anomaly in the long-term downward trend.

The average infant mortality for Alaska from 1997 through 2001 was 6.9 per 1,000 births—a rate virtually at the national average. Among regions of Alaska, the rate during that period was highest in the Southwest and Northern regions and lowest in the Gulf Coast and Interior regions of the state. That rate varied from nearly 13 per 1,000 infants in the Southwest region to 5.3 in the Gulf Coast.

Among infants of different races, mortality was highest among Native infants from 1997 to 2001, despite the sharp drop in Native infant deaths in recent decades. They were twice as likely as White or Asian babies—and nearly 60 percent more likely than Black infants—to die during their first year. But we also know that the neonatal mortality rate among Native babies is low; it is therefore post-neonatal mortality (between the ages of one month and one year) that is higher among Native infants.¹⁶ In fact, the post-neonatal mortality rate among all Alaska babies from 1998 to 2000 was 30 percent above the U.S. average.¹⁷





CAUSES OF INFANT MORTALITY

The top causes of U.S. infant mortality in 2000 were birth defects, low birth weight, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Birth defects were also the top cause of infant deaths in Alaska in 2000, but beyond that there were significant differences.

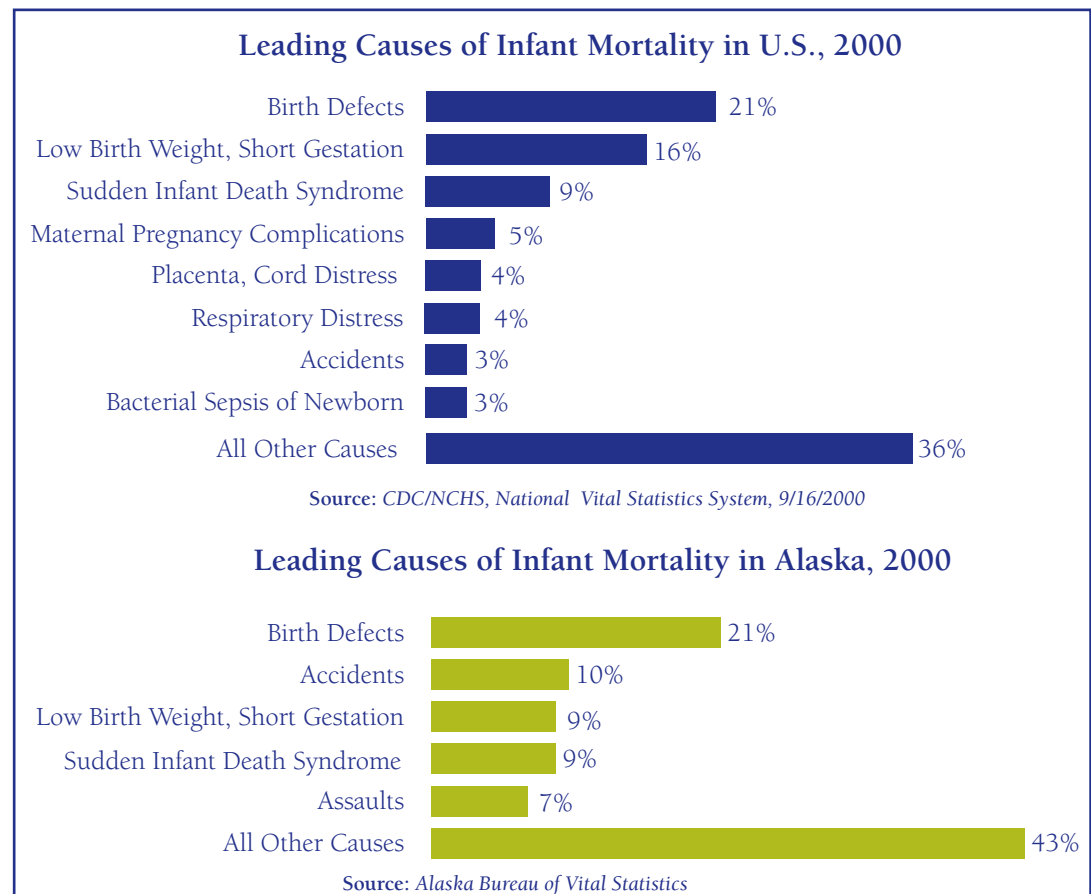
Accidents were responsible for 10 percent of infant deaths in Alaska, but just 3 percent nationwide. We know that children and teenagers in Alaska also have high rates of accidental injury and death. And in Alaska, assaults caused 7 percent of infant deaths; assaults do not even appear in the top 10 causes of infant death nationwide in 2000.

The good news is that infants in Alaska were less likely to die as a result of low birth weight in 2000; that corresponds with the fact that Alaska has among the nation's smallest rates of low birth weight.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) killed about 9 percent of the infants who died in both Alaska and the U.S. as a whole in 2000.

Many infant deaths from accidents and assaults are preventable. And a 1999 study by the Alaska Maternal-Infant Mortality Review found that a number of infant deaths could be prevented if parents placed infants on their backs to sleep, used infant-safe bedding, and put infants alone in their cribs to sleep.¹⁸

And finally, a 2000 study by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services found that nearly half of all infant deaths in Alaska between 1992 and 1997 were among mothers "whose records noted maternal use of alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs."¹⁹



Endnotes for Infancy

¹The Kessner index is one of several indexes that each measure adequacy of prenatal care somewhat differently.

²See, for example, U.S. Public Health Service, Expert Panel on the Content of Prenatal Care, *Caring for Our Future: The Content of Prenatal Care*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989. Cited by Child Trends Data Bank at: www.childtrendsdatbank.org/indicators/25PrenatalCare.cfm

³This discussion is about women not known to be at high risk for complications of pregnancy. Women who are at risk—for example, women who are carrying more than one fetus—have different prenatal care needs.

⁴Michael D. Kogan, National Center for Health Statistics, reported in *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1998, 279:1623-1628. Cited in *Women's Health Weekly*, "More Women Today Receive Prenatal Care," week of June 1 through June 8, 1998.

⁵William Evans and Diana Lien, "The Benefits of Prenatal Care: Evidence from the PAT Bus Strike," in *Journal of Economic Literature*, March 2002.

⁶Virginia Rall Chomitz, Lilian Cheung, and Ellice Lieberman, "The Role of Lifestyle in Preventing Low Birth Weight," in the *Future of Children*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1995. Available online at: www.futureofchildren.org.

⁷See note 5 above.

⁸See notes 4 and 5.

⁹See note 6.

¹⁰*Facts at a Glance*, Child Trends, November, 2003, page 4; and *Selected Birth Statistics Reported by Mother's Race, Alaska: 2000 and 1998-2000*, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Vital Statistics. Updated October 2002.

¹¹*Kids Count Data Book 2003*, page 36.

¹²*Ibid.*, page 40.

¹³*Kids Count Data Book 2004*, page 34.

¹⁴Scott Goldsmith and others, *Status of Alaska Natives 2004*, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, May 2004. See Chapter 3.

¹⁵Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, "Infant Mortality in Alaska: A Decade of Data," in *Alaska MCH Facts*, Maternal Child Health, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 2004.

¹⁶See note 14.

¹⁷See note 15.

¹⁸*Family Health Dataline*, December 2000, Vol. 6, No. 2.

¹⁹Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, *The Contribution of Parental Alcohol and Illicit Substance Use to Alaska Native and Non-Native Infant Mortality*, December 2000, Vol.6, No.3.



Picture a mouse who thinks of himself (rather modestly) as “the biggest, strongest, best-swimmingest” mouse who ever lived—a mouse for whom deep, wide lakes hold no terror.

Story continues on back of page.



Economic Well-Being



One day this fearless mouse stood at the edge of such a lake, bragging to his friends—other mice, small birds—that he could swim this enormous lake with no problem, such was the power of his mighty legs, his strong lungs.

His friends had heard such talk before, and they nodded and smiled knowingly. “Sure, right, you can do it. You bet. Uh-huh.”

Enraged by these doubting friends, the mouse jumped into the lake and began swimming rapidly away from shore. Now his friends grew alarmed and raced along the shoreline, calling him back. “Stop! It’s too dangerous. You don’t know what’s out there!”

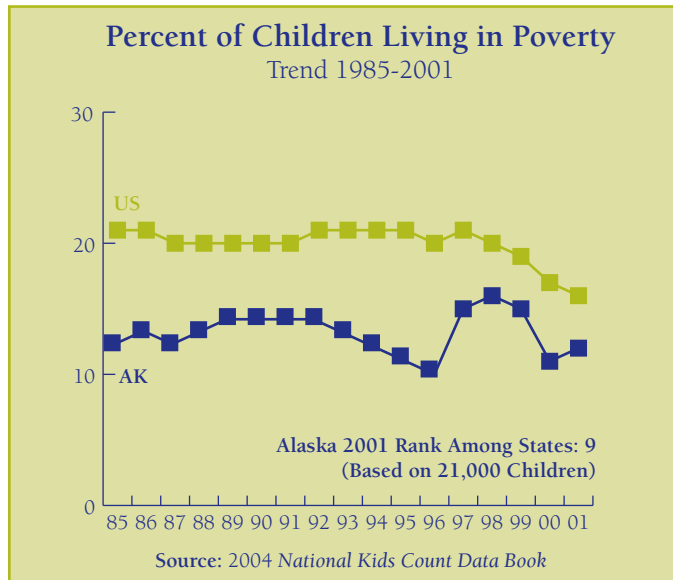
But the mouse pressed on and finally reached the far shore, tired but victorious. His friends cheered and acknowledged that he was, without doubt, “the best-swimmingest” mouse who ever lived.

And that’s almost the end of the story. What the bragging mouse and his small friends didn’t know was that the “lake” he had just braved was in fact the footprint of a very large bear, filled with rainwater.

The bragging mouse is the lead character in a series of traditional stories that Tommy Ongtooguk, an Inupiat from northwest Alaska, told his children as they were growing up in the 1960s.

His son Paul Ongtooguk—who now teaches at the University of Alaska Anchorage—remembers that the stories were always fun and meant to entertain.

But the exploits of the bragging mouse also held a message for Inupiat children as they grew up: Go ahead and enjoy your accomplishments. Just keep things in perspective—the world is very big, and your corner of it is very small.



DEFINITION

The trend graph shows the percentage of children under 18 living in poor families, as measured by the poverty threshold established by the U.S. Census Bureau every year. The poverty threshold for a family of four in 2003 was less than \$19,000. The threshold varies with family size and composition, but it is the same for all states—that is, it doesn't take into account any differences in living costs among states. The poverty threshold is used for statistical comparisons and not for determining eligibility for government aid programs.¹ Figures since 1997 are not comparable with earlier figures, because the *Kids Count* program changed data sources.²

SIGNIFICANCE

Children who grow up poor in America have three strikes against them when they're young and continuing disadvantages as they get older. Poor children have to do without

things parents with more money can give their children—like nice neighborhoods, good schools, and regular medical care—things that not only make childhood more pleasant but safer and healthier. And researchers report that those who come from poor families are more likely to become teenage parents and to earn less or be out of work as adults.³

Americans who are poor also often end up paying more for necessities, so the money they have buys even less. As the national *Kids Count Data Book* pointed out in a 2003 essay, poor people in rural places or inner cities often can't get to supermarkets or big discount chains and so pay higher prices for food, clothes, and

other items in neighborhood stores. And people with low incomes and no credit typically have to pay significantly higher interest rates to buy cars and other big purchases. And so on: as the essay pointed out, being poor is expensive.⁴

DATA

The trend graph shows that 12 percent of children in Alaska and 16 percent of children nationwide lived in families with incomes below the poverty threshold in 2001. But that threshold doesn't take into account differences in costs of living—and costs are known to be higher in Alaska, especially in small, remote communities. So some analysts argue that the poverty threshold underestimates poverty in Alaska.

The table below shows how poverty—again, as measured by the poverty threshold—varies among children of different ages and people of all ages in Alaska and nationwide. Regardless of whether the threshold really captures poverty in Alaska, the table makes clear that nationwide and in Alaska, children under age 5 are the likeliest to be poor, and children of all ages are likelier than adults to be poor.⁵

Another measure of poverty, as shown in the pie graph on the next page, is the share of “low-income” families with children. As defined by the National Center for Children in Poverty, low-income families are all those with incomes less than 200 percent of the poverty threshold—what the center calls poor and near-poor families.⁶

In Alaska in 2000, close to 27 percent of families were considered low-income—10 percent poor and 17 percent near-poor. Nationally, 34 percent of families with children were low-income—14 percent poor and 20 percent near-poor. Again, these numbers are based on the federal poverty threshold, which does not take into account Alaska's higher cost of living.

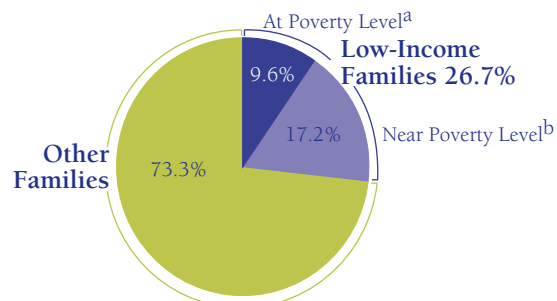
ESTIMATED POPULATION LIVING BELOW POVERTY THRESHOLD, 2000

	U.S.	Alaska
Children Under Age 18	16.2%	11.5%
Related Children 5-17 in Families	14.6%	10.0%
Children Under 5	18.7%	13.5%
People of All Ages	11.3%	8.5%
Median Household Income	\$41,990	\$51,443

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*, 2000

Children Living in Poverty (continued)

How Many Alaska Families With Children Have Low Incomes?



^aIncome at or below federal poverty threshold, which was about \$18,850 for a family of four in recent years.

^bIncome between 100 and 200 percent of federal poverty threshold, which was about \$36,800 for a family of four in recent years.

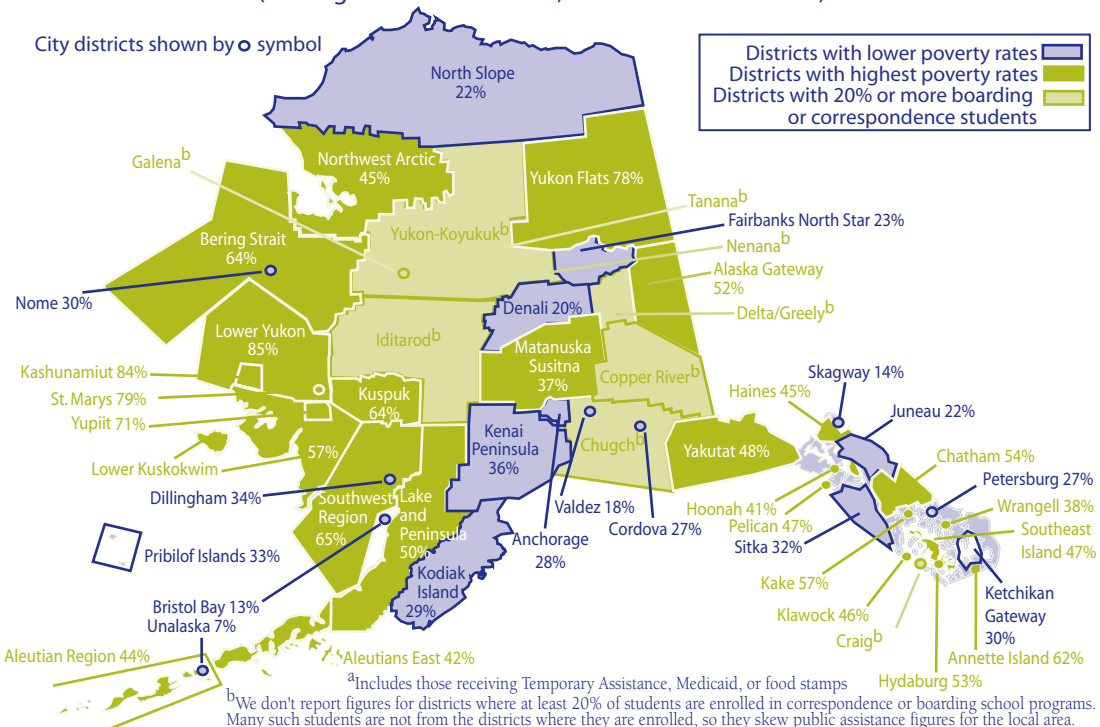
Source: National Center for Children in Poverty (www.nccp.org)

Yet another measure of poverty is relying on public assistance. The map shows the share of school children in each district whose families receive welfare benefits, Medicaid, or food stamps.⁷ This share fluctuates from year to year in districts with small enrollments. In the 2001-2002 school year, the share varied from 7 percent in Unalaska (a major fishing port in the Aleutian chain) to 60 percent or more in some rural districts of western and interior Alaska. In the state's largest districts—Anchorage, the Mat-Su, Kenai Peninsula, Fairbanks, and Juneau—the share ranged from 22 percent to 37 percent.

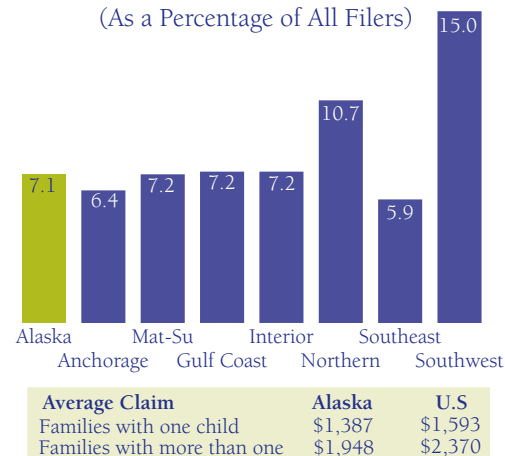
And as a final measure of poverty, we look at the share of Alaska families claiming the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. That's a tax provision allowing low-income households to receive a refund of some or all their federal income tax. Qualifying income varies by household size; for example, in 2003, a married couple with two children could qualify if their annual income was below about \$34,700.

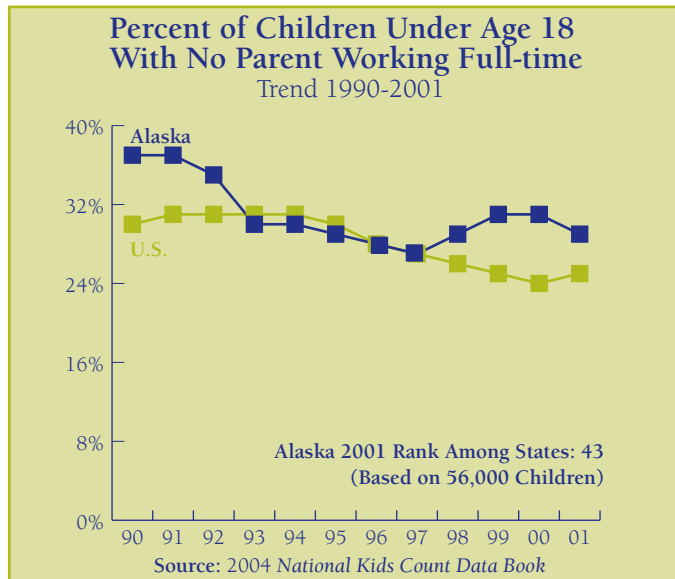
In Alaska in 2001, 23,055 Alaska households with children claimed the tax credit; that was about 7 percent of such households filing taxes.⁸ The average credit for families with one child was \$1,387 and for those with two children \$1,948. The percentage of families claiming the credit was the smallest in Southeast Alaska, where less than 6 percent filed for the credit; in the Southwest region, that figure was more than double, at 15 percent.

Share of School Children Ages 5-17 Receiving Public Assistance^a (Among 53 School Districts, 2001-2002 School Year)



Families With Children Claiming Federal Earned Income Tax Credit, 2001 (As a Percentage of All Filers)





DEFINITION

This indicator reports the percentage of children under 18 living in families where neither parent has a full-time, year-round job.

SIGNIFICANCE

Having at least one parent with a full-time, year-round job provides a more stable environment for children—but if the parent’s job pays just minimum wage, the children are still likely to live in poverty. Parents with full-time jobs at higher wages are more likely to have health insurance, sick leave, and other benefits for themselves and their families. Research shows that children from families with higher incomes on average get better grades and are more likely to graduate from high school and go on to college; they are less likely to be depressed and anti-social.⁹ Also, children whose parents work regularly grow up with an example of how to maintain a daily routine of work and family—an example that can serve them well when they move into the working world themselves.¹⁰

DATA

As the trend graph shows, the share of children with neither parent working full-time declined in the 1990s, in both Alaska and the U.S. as a whole. Analysts believe much of that decline is the result of more single mothers working full time now than in 1990—about half, compared with a third in the early 1990s.¹¹ That shift in part reflects national welfare reform that began in 1997, requiring most recipients to look for work.

But while full-time employment is more likely to bring families economic stability, it’s not a guarantee. The National Center for Children in Poverty reports on employment among low-income and other families with children.¹² “Low-income” families include families with incomes at or below the federal poverty threshold, as well as families with incomes up to 200 percent of the poverty threshold.¹³

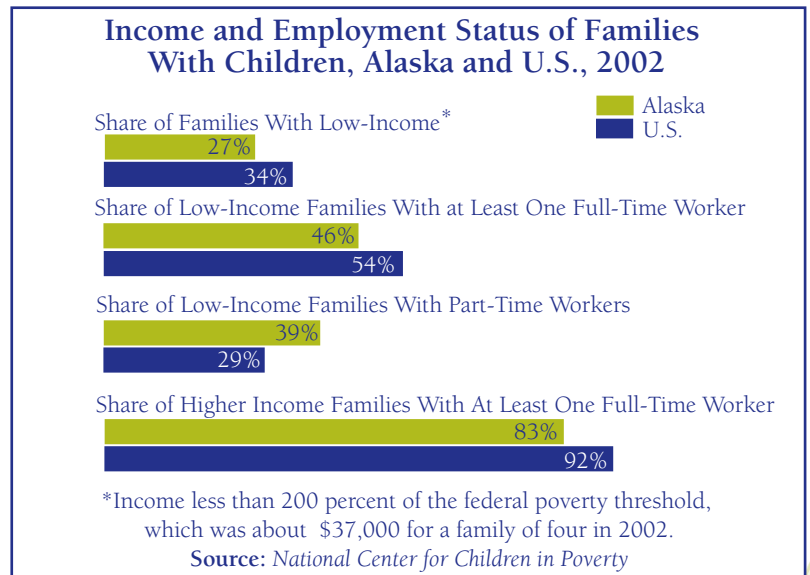
Among families with higher incomes—more than 200 percent of the poverty threshold—92 percent nationwide and 83 percent in Alaska had full-time workers in 2002. But 54 percent of low-income families with children nationwide, and 46 percent in Alaska, also had full-time workers.

Low-income families in Alaska are more likely than low-income families nationwide to have part-time workers: nearly 40 percent, compared with about 30 percent.

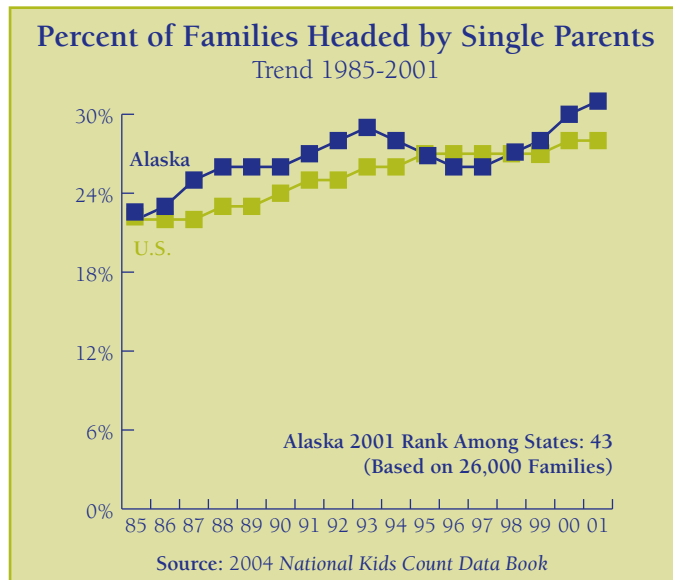
LIMITATIONS OF INDICATOR IN ALASKA

This indicator makes it clear that many children nationwide are growing up in families with little economic stability. But in Alaska, this indicator has limitations, largely because of the nature of the rural economy

Jobs are scarce in rural Alaska, especially in remote villages. Of the jobs that are available, many are not full-time, year-round—jobs in commercial fishing and construction, for example. A lot of rural Alaskans provide for their families through a combination of seasonal work and subsistence hunting and fishing.¹⁴ Wild fish and game have economic value, because families that get a significant share of their food through hunting and fishing don’t have to buy as much. Ascribing a dollar value to such resources is difficult and controversial, but nevertheless they have value. This indicator can’t take into account the economic (and other) benefits of the subsistence way of life.



Children in Families Headed by Single Parents



DEFINITION

This indicator measures the percentage of families headed by single parents with children under 18. Single parents can be either men or women, but most—about 75 percent nationwide—are women. The children may be related to the parents by birth, adoption, or marriage.

SIGNIFICANCE

Raising children is challenging even for couples—but the challenges are multiplied for single parents raising children alone. Researchers continue to debate all the effects on children of growing up in single-parent households, and no two households are alike. But many single-parent households are headed by women either at or barely above the poverty level. In 2000, 34 percent of households headed by single women nationwide had incomes at the federal poverty level, compared with about 9 percent of all households.¹⁵ Research has documented a broad range of ill-effects of growing up poor, in addition to the obvious

risks like going hungry and living in sub-standard housing. Children from low-income families are, for example, more likely to do poorly in school and to have behavioral problems.¹⁶

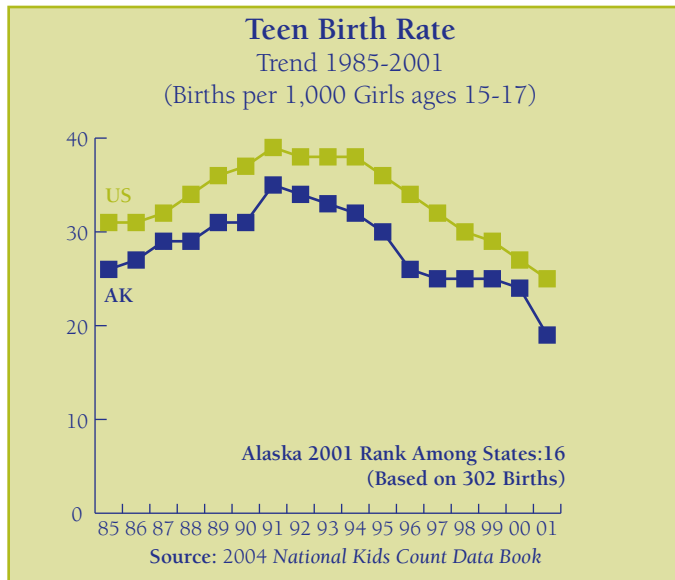
Researchers disagree about other kinds of effects on children growing up in single-parent households, independent of those associated with low incomes. Some researchers have concluded that when children are raised by their mothers alone, girls are about twice as likely to become teenage mothers and boys are more likely to have trouble finding and keeping jobs as adults.¹⁷ Others disagree, maintaining that many factors influence children's behavior and later success in life—and that children of single-parent families are “neither doomed nor relieved from doom,” simply because they grow up in households with just one parent.¹⁸

DATA

The trend graph shows that in 2001, an estimated 31 percent of family households in Alaska were headed by single parents, compared with the national average of 28 percent. Alaska ranked 43rd in the nation on this indicator in 2001—meaning that Alaska has one of the highest rates of single-parent families in the nation.

The percentage of single-parent families in Alaska slowly but steadily increased between 1996 and 2001. It also increased from 27 to 28 percent nationwide during that period, and in some states—Montana, for instance—the percentage of single-parent families increased faster than it did in Alaska.

We don't know what pushed up the share of single-parent families in Alaska, and we don't have adequate data to chart regional differences. Data from the 2000 U.S. census show that urban Alaska households are more likely than rural households to be headed by single women, and that Native households are more likely than other Alaska households to be headed by single women or men.¹⁹



DEFINITION

This indicator reports teen birth rates—births per 1,000 girls—among younger (15 to 17), older (18 to 19), and all (15 to 19) teenage girls, in the U.S. and Alaska. Regional data for Alaska reflect the mother’s place of residence, not the place where the baby was born.

SIGNIFICANCE

Most teenage mothers face an uphill battle. To begin with, as we saw in the Prenatal Care indicator, teenage mothers are less likely to get adequate prenatal care. They’re also less likely to finish high school and so aren’t qualified for jobs that pay well. Society faces extra costs to support families of teenage parents; an estimated three quarters go on welfare at some point.²⁰ Only about a third of teenage mothers ages 15 to 17 get child support payments from the fathers of their children.²¹ Children of teenage mothers are several times more likely to be poor than children born to older mothers.²²

Fortunately, the birth rate among teenage girls nationwide dropped 20 percent in the 1990s and is still declining. The decline has been among younger and older teenagers, among all racial and ethnic groups, and in all states. (Keep in mind, however, that a declining rate doesn’t translate into a similar decline in the number of births to teenage mothers, since there are now more teenagers than a decade ago.)

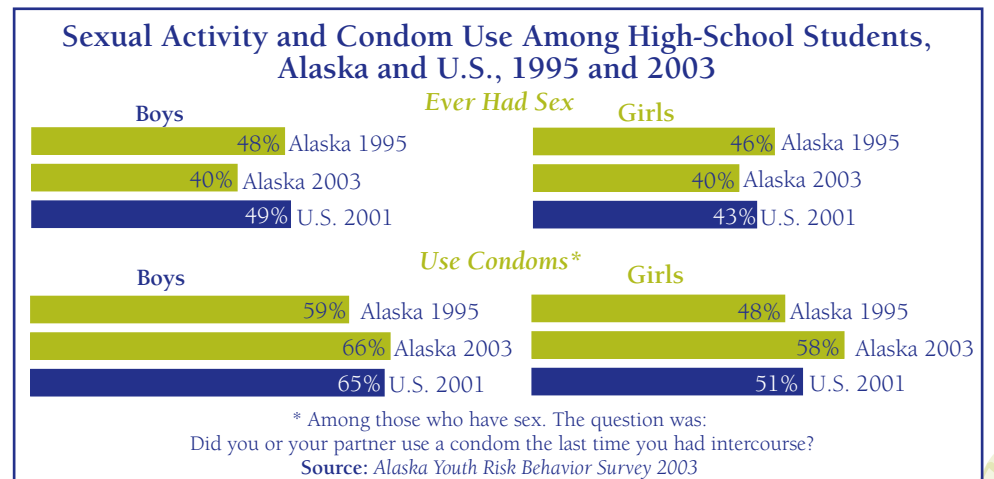
Analysts attribute much of the decline to teenagers’ increased use of contraceptives—especially long-lasting contraceptives—and to decreased sexual activity among teenagers, due to increased fear of sexually transmitted diseases and other factors.²³ And as the graph below shows, the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that sexual activity is down and condom use is up among high-school students since 1995, both nationwide and in Alaska.

But despite the recent decline, teenage birth rates in the U.S. remain far higher than in

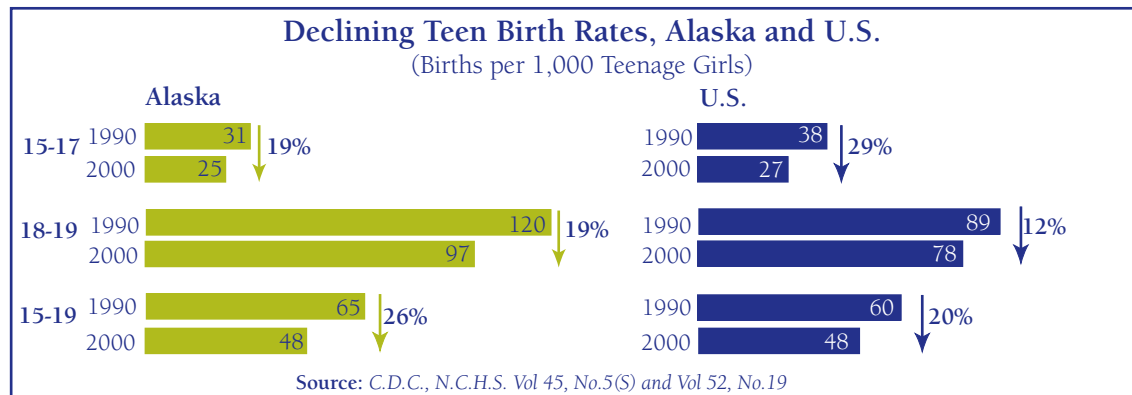
other developed countries. For instance, in the mid-1990s the birth rate per 1,000 girls 15 to 19 was less than 8 in Sweden and 10 in France, compared with 54 in the U.S.²⁴ And a child advocacy group recently pointed out other reasons why the current rate of teenage births is still worrisome: an estimated 18 percent of American girls who are 15 years old now will have babies before they’re 20; more than three quarters of teen births in the U.S. are to unmarried girls, whose children are very likely to grow up poor and face many hardships; and about one in five teen births are to girls who already have babies.²⁵

DATA

Births to teenage mothers made up about 11 percent of all births in Alaska and in the U.S. as a whole in 2001.²⁶ The trend graph shows the annual rate of births per 1,000 girls 15 to 17 in Alaska and the U.S. since 1985. Alaska’s rate of birth to younger teenagers has consistently been below the national average since 1985 and fell 23 percent between 1990 and 2000. As of 2001, only 15 states had lower birth rates among younger teenagers.

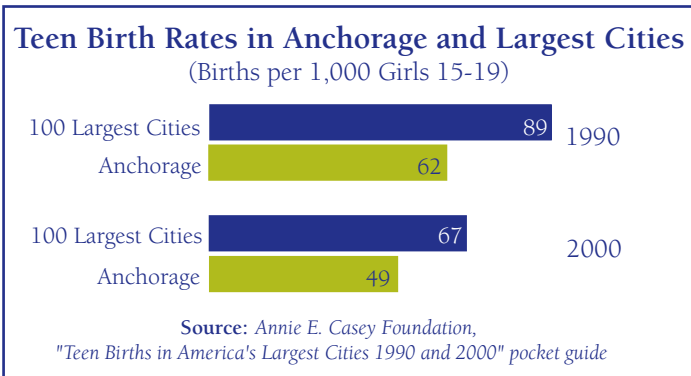
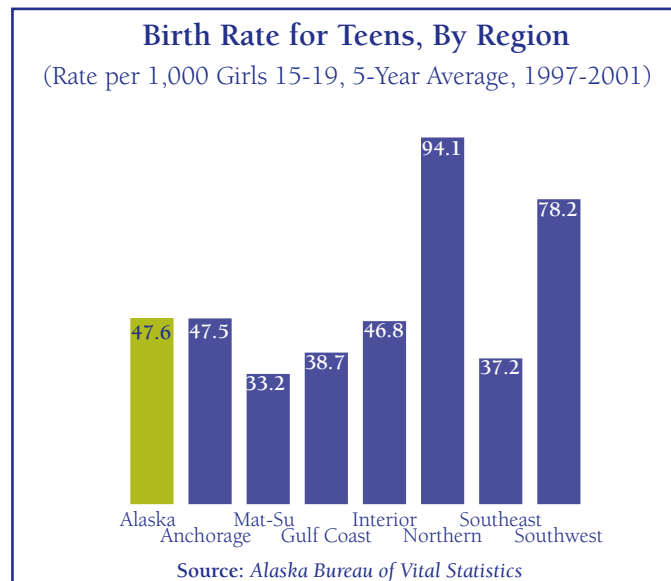


Birth to Teens (continued)



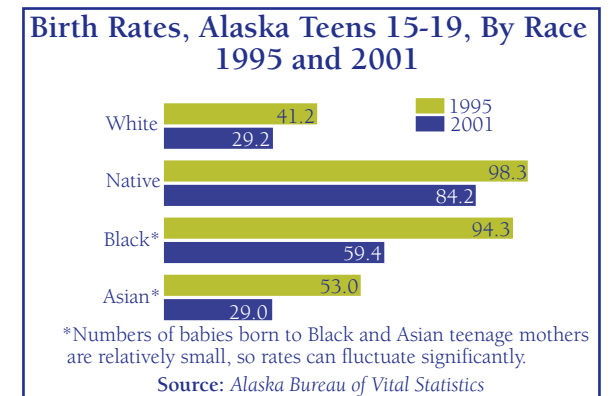
But the bar graphs above show that the rate of births to older teens—those 18 and 19—was considerably higher in Alaska than in the U.S. as a whole in 1990 and remained so in 2000, although the gap had narrowed. Between 1990 and 2000 the birth rate among older teens in Alaska dropped from 120 per 1,000 to 97—a decline of 19 percent. During the same period, the rate among teens 18 and 19 nationwide dropped from 89 per 1,000 to 78—a decline of about 12 percent.

The combined effect of declining birth rates among both older and younger teenagers in Alaska over the past decade is that by 2000, the birth rate for all teenagers (15 to 19) in Alaska was at 48 per 1,000—just at the national average. In Anchorage, the teen birth rate was considerably below that in other large cities in 1990 and remained about 25 percent lower in 2000.



The birth rate by region of Alaska varied sharply in the period 1997-2001—from a low of about 33 per 1,000 in the Mat-Su region to a high of more than 94 in the Northern region.

Finally, the graph below shows the changing birth rate among Alaska teenagers of different races between 1995 and 2001. Rates fell among girls of all races. But in 2001 rates among Native teenagers remained more than twice those of White and Asian teenagers.



DEFINITION

This indicator looks at the need for and the types of child care available in Alaska and nationwide. Specific Alaska information about total demand for paid child care, and types of child care Alaskans actually use, is not available.

SIGNIFICANCE

Finding care for young children and after-school activities for older children is a necessity for working parents throughout the U.S. Both parents work in 64 percent of married-couple families nationwide; that share is 67 percent in Alaska.²⁷ Also, welfare reforms that require recipients to look for work have contributed to a nationwide increase in single mothers who work, up from a third in 1990 to half in 2000.²⁸

And researchers have recently learned more about the importance of early childhood education—that is, education before children start formal schooling—not only for success in school but also in later life.²⁹

DATA

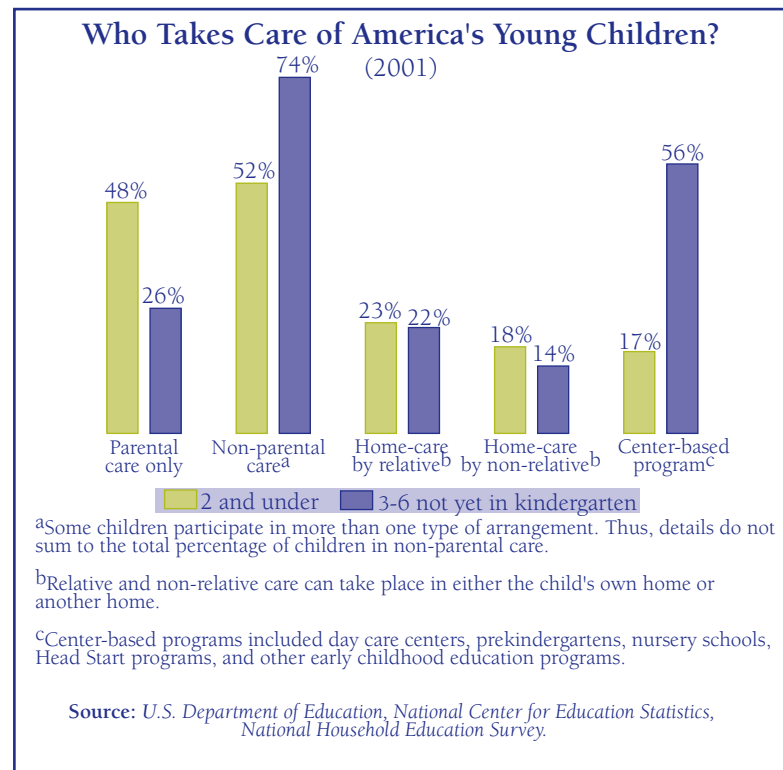
Almost 29 percent of children under six in Alaska were in paid child care in 2000, slightly above the national average of 26 percent.³⁰ But the share of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in pre-

primary education (kindergarten, preschool, or nursery school) was lower in Alaska than nationwide in 2000—about 52 percent compared with 62 percent.³¹ However, the share of Alaska children in pre-primary school increased sharply in the 1990s.³²

Specific information on who takes care of Alaska's children 6 and under doesn't exist, but the adjacent figure shows the nationwide breakdown among the youngest children (2 and under) and those ages 3 to 6 who aren't yet in kindergarten.³³ Among the youngest, roughly half are cared for by their parents only and the other half are in some form of non-parental care, primarily home care. By the time children are ages 3 to 6, three-quarters are cared for by someone other than their parents—mostly in day care centers and other early education programs.

After children start school, about half up to the third grade still need some non-parental care after school (see next page). Among those in fourth through eighth grade, about one quarter take care of themselves after school.

Precise data on kinds of child-care Alaska families use don't exist, but



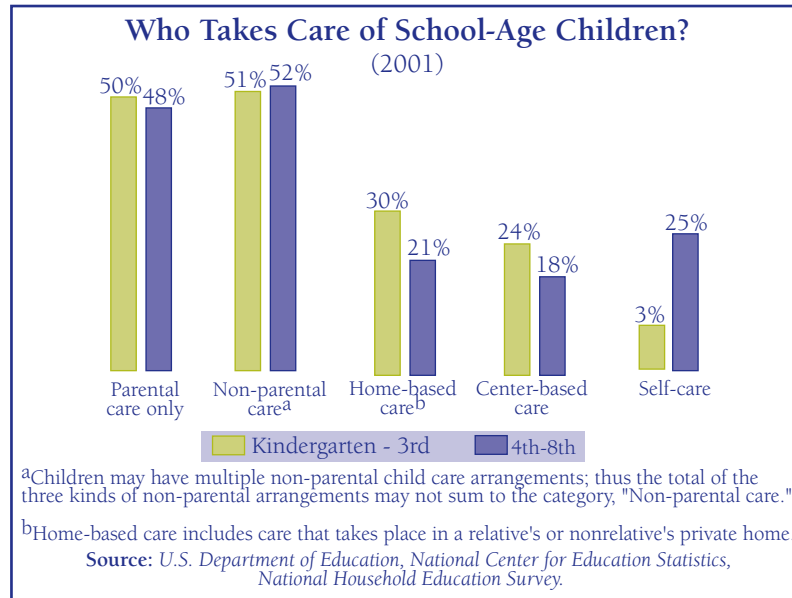
we do know the types and capacity of child care available in the state. There are state-licensed facilities and state-approved homes, which are not licensed but have to meet safety and other standards and can care for only up to five children. Facilities that are licensed have to meet higher standards and can serve more children.

Nearly half of Alaska's 1,130 child-care facilities are state-approved (unlicensed) homes, as the pie graph on the next page shows. But licensed homes and centers have more than 85 percent of the state's capacity, because they can care for so many more children.³⁴

SHARE OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN PAID CHILD CARE AND IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS, ALASKA AND U.S., 2000				
Percent of Children Under 6 in Paid Child Care	Alaska		U.S.	
	28.5%		26.1%	
Percent of Children Ages 3 to 5 Enrolled in Pre-primary Programs	1990	2000	1990	2000
	37.3%	51.6%	42%	61.4%

Sources: Kids Count Data Book 2003; U.S. Census Bureau

Child Care (continued)

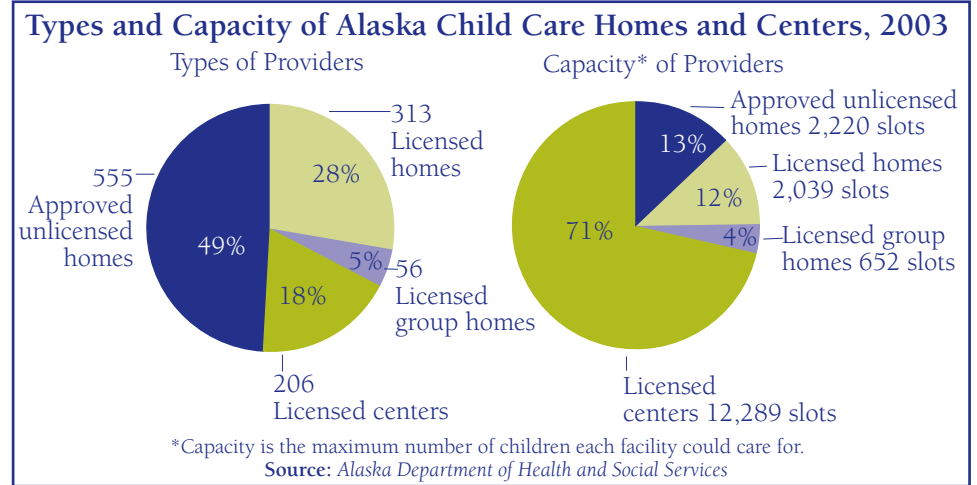


We don't know how the state's child-care capacity fits the needs of all Alaska families, because we don't have data on overall demand. But we do know the numbers of families receiving state-subsidized child care. Families can qualify for state-subsidized child care if (1) they are receiving welfare benefits and either working or looking for work; or (2) they have incomes low enough to meet the program standards. Some of the families in the second category have recently left welfare but others have never received welfare.

As the adjacent table shows, numbers of families receiving subsidized child care dropped considerably from 2002 to 2003; that reflects the continuing decline in the welfare caseload; reduced income standards for the subsidy program; and other factors.³⁵

In recent years Alaska's state government has tried to create incentives for low-income families in child care subsidy programs to place their children in licensed facilities. The state now pays higher reimbursements for licensed facilities offering early childhood education programs; it also has a program to improve education and training among child-care workers.

As of April 2004, 75 percent of the children in the subsidy program for low-income families were in licensed facilities; that was up from about 60 percent in December 2001.³⁶



FAMILIES WITH SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE, DECEMBER 2003

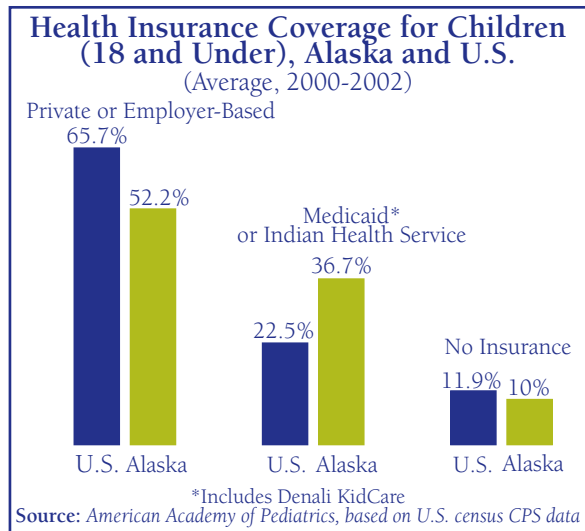
	Number	Percent Change 2002-2003
Families receiving child care, working or participating in work activities, and receiving welfare ^a	506	-24%
Families receiving child care that left welfare within the past year ^b	352	-21%
Other low-income families receiving child care ^b	2,453	-7%

Note: Figures include only state-administered programs; subsidy programs administered by Alaska Native non-profit organizations are not included.

^aOverall, 2,142 families were receiving welfare benefits and working or participating in work activities in late 2003— so about 24% were receiving subsidized child care.

^bFamilies within the first year of leaving welfare have priority in this program. Other low-income families can qualify, when there is adequate funding.

Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services



DEFINITION

The most commonly published figures on health insurance coverage are from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). Since 1997, CPS figures have classified children who are eligible to receive medical care at Indian Health Service facilities as uninsured.³⁷ While IHS health care programs are not "insurance"—because they're offered only at IHS clinics and hospitals—they nevertheless provide health care coverage. And including IHS-covered children in the "uninsured" category increases the percentage of uninsured children significantly more in Alaska than in the U.S. as a whole, because such a large share of children in the state are Alaska Native.

The figures in the bar graph above are from the American Academy of Pediatrics, which also uses CPS figures but modifies them so IHS-covered children are not considered uninsured, but rather are grouped with Medicaid, because both are government-funded health care programs.

SIGNIFICANCE

Access to health care is critical. But with today's high and rising medical costs, families without health insurance—or coverage under government-funded programs like Medicaid—hesitate before making even routine medical visits. And the uninsured face staggering medical costs in the event of serious illness or injury.

In Alaska, health care costs are far higher than the national average; a 2001 study by the Alaska Division of Medical Assistance estimated that charges for most medical and surgical procedures in Alaska were 80 percent higher than the U.S. average.³⁸

A recent report by the Institute of Medicine cited specific consequences for Americans who lack health insurance.³⁹

- Only half of uninsured children visited doctors in 2001, compared with three-quarters of insured children. When children don't get regular care, doctors have fewer opportunities to prevent problems, and delays in treating problems can increase costs. Also, lack of regular care can disrupt children's learning and development.
- Uninsured Americans on average get about half the medical care of those with health insurance. As a result, they tend to be sicker and to die earlier.
- If just one family member is uninsured, the entire family is at risk for the financial consequences of a catastrophic illness or injury.

DATA

Children can be covered by private or employer-provided health insurance or by government-funded programs—either (1) Indian Health Service programs, which the federal

government provides to American Indians and Alaska Natives as part of its responsibility to indigenous Americans; or (2) Medicaid, a joint federal-state program for those with low incomes. Since 1997, Medicaid has also included a special program for children and pregnant women whose incomes are somewhat too high to qualify for Medicaid but who lack other coverage. In Alaska, that expansion of Medicaid is known as Denali KidCare; children from families with incomes up to 175 percent of the federal poverty level can qualify.⁴⁰

The bar graph shows that on average from 2000 through 2002, nearly 66 percent of children nationwide were covered by private or employer-based insurance, compared with just 52 percent in Alaska.

By contrast, nearly 37 percent of children in Alaska but less than 23 percent nationwide were covered by government programs. That difference in part reflects the fact that about 25 percent of Alaska's children are Alaska Natives—and therefore eligible for federal IHS programs—while nationwide American Indians make up only about 1 percent of the population. Nearly 12 percent of children nationwide and 10 percent in Alaska had no health care coverage in recent years.⁴¹

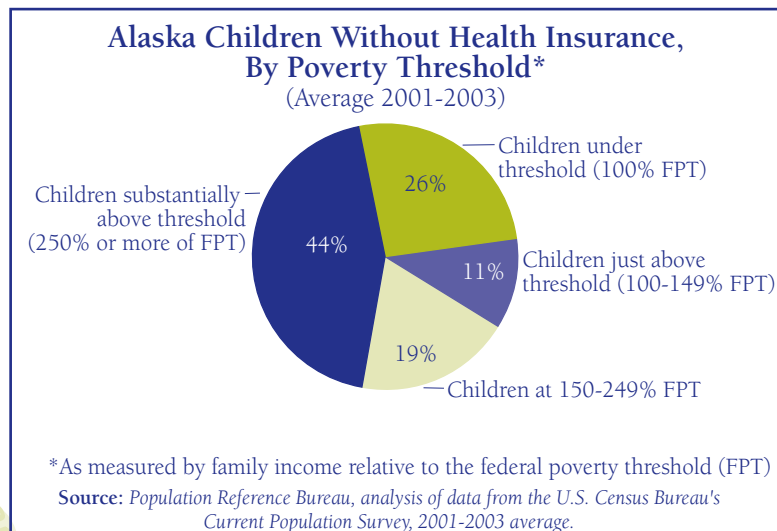
And, as the pie chart on the next page shows, not all the Alaska children without coverage come from the poorest families. The pie chart is based on CPS data and therefore includes as "uninsured" children who are eligible for care through the Indian Health Service. Still, it gives a good general picture of income levels among uninsured families in Alaska.

Health Care Coverage (continued)

About one quarter of the uninsured children come from families at the poverty threshold and another 20 percent from families just above that threshold. But 44 percent come from families with at least 2.5 times the income the federal government considers poverty level.

That figure makes it clear that a number of Alaska families with incomes significantly above the poverty threshold either can't afford to buy their own insurance or can't afford to pay the premiums for employer-based programs.

As we noted earlier, children in uninsured families with incomes up to 175 percent of the federal poverty level can qualify for Alaska's Denali KidCare program. About 22,000 Alaska children were enrolled in that program in 2002, and a non-profit group recently estimated that 12,000 uninsured Alaska children live in families with incomes low enough to make them eligible for Denali KidCare.



¹Another federal agency, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, issues poverty guidelines every year. Those income guidelines are higher for Alaska and Hawaii than for other states, in recognition of Alaska and Hawaii's higher living costs. It is these guidelines that are used to determine eligibility for government aid programs like free school lunches or food stamps.

² See *2000 Kids Count Data Book*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, pages 178-179.

³Federal Agency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, 2003. Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, page 16.

⁴See "The High Cost of Being Poor," in *2003 Kids Count Data Book*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, pages 11-20.

⁵U.S. Census Bureau, *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*, 2000.

⁶See the Alaska demographics section at: http://nccp.org/state_detail_demographic_AK.html

⁷Data from Heather Brown, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.

⁸Special run by John Wancheck, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Washington, D.C., May 13, 2004.

⁹K. Secombe, "Families in Poverty in the 1990s: Trends, Causes, Consequences, and Lessons Learned," in *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62 (November 2000), pages 1094-1113.

¹⁰See national *2003 Kids Count Data Book*, page 48.

¹¹Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2002, *America's Children: Key Indicators of Well-Being*, U.S. Government Printing Office, page 18; cited in national *Kids Count Data Book 2003*.

¹²See note 6 above.

¹³See the Poverty indicator for a discussion of the purposes of and differences between the poverty threshold and the poverty guidelines.

¹⁴The Alaska Federation of Natives estimates, for example, that wild food harvests supply a third of the caloric requirements of rural Alaskans. See AFN's Web site: www.nativefederation.org/wellness/subsistence/facts.html

¹⁵"Census: Many single moms struggle to pay bills," in *USA Today*, July 19, 2002.

¹⁶See discussions in and notes to the Children Living in Poverty and Children with No Parent Working Full-Time indicators.

¹⁷S. McLanahan, *Life without Father: What Happens to the Children?* Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University, Working Paper #01-21, 2001.

¹⁸Pilot Publishing, "Confronting the Myths of Single Parenting," in *Single Parenting in the Nineties*, 1995. Reprinted, with publisher's permission, by The Parents' Place at www.parentsplace.com

¹⁹Scott Goldsmith and others, *Status of Alaska Natives 2004*, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, May 2004, page 2-55.

²⁰Cited in national *2004 Kids Count Data Book*, page 38; original source is data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth*, 1997.

²¹*Ibid.*; original source is U.S. Census Bureau, *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support*, 2001, Table 4, detailed tables.

²²See Figure 4 and accompanying text, *2004 Kids Count Data Book*, page 38.

²³Based on data from the 1995 *National Survey of Family Growth*, cited in *Kids Count* Listserv message, February 19, 2004.

²⁴Jacqueline Darroch and others, "Differences in Teenage Pregnancy Rates Among Five Developed Countries: The Role of Sexual Activity and Contraceptive Use," in *Family Planning Perspectives*, 2001 33(6): 244-250 and 281.

²⁵Child Trends, *Memo to Individuals and Organizations Concerned About Teenage Childbearing*, November 2003. See: www.childtrendsdatabank.org/

²⁶See more information about numbers of births to mothers of different ages in the Prenatal indicator.

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 census.

²⁸Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2002, *America's Children: Key Indicators of Well-Being*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003, page 18; cited in national *Kids Count Data Book 2003*.

²⁹D. Vandell and B. Wolfe, *Child Care Quality: Does It Matter and Does It Need To Be Improved?* Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin Madison, Special Report No. 78, November 2000.

³⁰ Auxiliary Tables for *Kids Count Data Book*: 2003, page 23. Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey data, 1999-2001.

³¹*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, page 128. Full citation in note 3.

³²This growth occurred as more mothers of young children—especially single mothers—moved into the work force.

³³U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

³⁴Personal communication from Mike Huelsman, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, July 13, 2004.

³⁵Data on families receiving subsidized child care from Craig Kahklen and Mary Lorence of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

³⁶Same source as in note 34. In 2000, Alaska established the System for Early Education Development (SEED), a program to help child-care workers get increased training and education. By 2002, over 600 caregivers had received Level I certification through SEED.

³⁷The CPS has also modified its health insurance questions several times in recent years, and in 2001 added a question that had the effect of reducing the number of Americans lacking insurance. Revised CPS estimates were made for 1999, but numbers from previous years are inconsistent with the most recent figures.

³⁸Alaska Division of Medical Assistance, *Are Medical Care Costs Higher?* Health Care Cost Project Analysis, November 2001.

³⁹Institute of Medicine, *Insuring America's Health*. Washington, D.C., National Academy Press, 2004, page xi.

⁴⁰In 2003, the Alaska Legislature lowered the income eligibility requirement from 200 percent to 175 percent of the federal poverty level. Analysts estimate that the change will cost 1,200 children and 120 women health care coverage.

⁴¹The Current Population Survey counts as uninsured children under 19 who were not covered by health insurance at any point during the year.

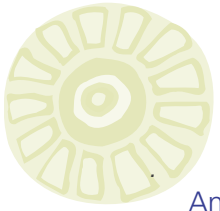


When half his sled dog team got into a jumble of crossed lines, Andy Willis knew just what to do. He unhooked the dog that had instigated the jumble, loaded it into the sled bag, and got to work on the lines. What he didn't know was that the dog in the sled wasn't quite through raising havoc.

Story continues on back of page



Education



Andy and his friend Dallas Hill, both of Anchorage, were out on a training run for the 1994 Junior Iditarod Sled Dog Race. That race grew out of the annual 1,100-mile Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race from Anchorage to Nome. In the junior event, mushers 14 to 17 years old race 160 miles in a loop through the Susitna Valley area north of Anchorage.

Andy, 16, and Dallas, 14, were often accompanied on their training runs by Andy's dad Bernie, who drove a snowmachine ahead of their dog teams, breaking trail and checking conditions.

Dallas saw Andy had a problem, and set the drag hook to hold his own team while he went to help. But while Andy and Dallas worked to untangle Andy's team, the dog in the sled chewed through the bag, through the sled below, and through the gangline that connects the team to the sled. And half the team—the unjumbled half—took off down the trail.

Dallas quickly climbed onto his sled and started after the loose dogs. Meanwhile, Andy's dad Bernie had traveled on up the trail on his snowmachine, unaware of the chase unfolding behind him.

Dallas raced on after the dogs, which stayed on the trail but out of reach. All the while he was shouting to Bernie, who didn't hear him; he was concentrating on the trail

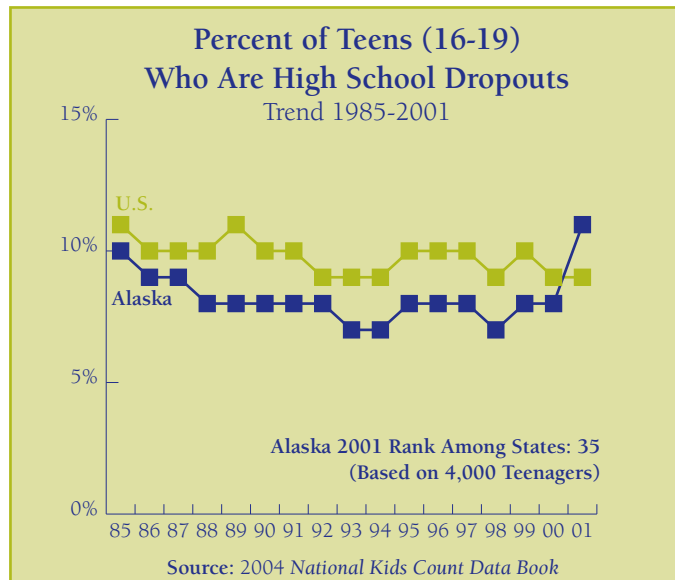
ahead, not the scene behind.

In desperation, as the loose dogs pulled further ahead, Dallas pulled out the flare gun he carried to keep moose away from his team and for other emergencies. This seemed to him an appropriate emergency: he shot a flare over Bernie's shoulder—which at last caught Bernie's attention. He turned around, saw the problem, and collared the runaway dogs.

Dallas and Andy both competed in the Junior Iditarod in February 1994—with no tangles, no misbehaving dogs, and no runaways.

The 1,100-mile Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race from Anchorage to Nome is probably the best known sled dog race in the world. It commemorates the 1925 Serum Run, when mushers faced temperatures of 60 degrees below zero and winds gusting above 50 miles an hour to relay serum from Nenana to Nome, where diphtheria had broken out.

The race crosses part of the historic Iditarod Trail, which was used to haul supplies and mail from the port at Seward to the gold fields near Nome. The Iditarod draws mushers from around the world.



SIGNIFICANCE

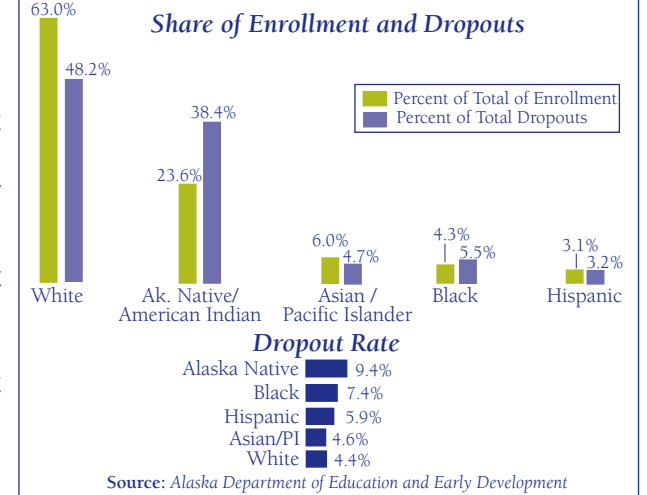
A significant share of adults in the U.S. lack high-school diplomas. In 2002, about 84 percent of women and 83 percent of men over age 25 were high-school graduates.¹ Failing to graduate not only keeps young people from moving on to college but increasingly limits how much they can earn.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 2001 median earnings of high-school graduates was \$29,187, compared with just \$21,384 among those who hadn't graduated. And the more education beyond high school, the more earning power: among those with four-year college degrees, median 2001 earnings were \$46,969, and those with doctorates or professional degrees earned \$75,000 or more.²

DATA

Alaska's dropout rate among 16- to 19-year-olds held fairly steady at near 8 percent in the 1990s but climbed to 11 percent in 2001—a shift from below to well above the U.S. average.

Alaska Dropouts (Grades 7-12), By Race and Enrollment, 2001-2002 School Year



It's not yet clear why Alaska dropout rates are rising, but some analysts believe that at least part of the explanation lies in the higher accountability standards the state has enacted in recent years, including (as we discuss under the School Achievement indicator) a new high-school exit exam.³

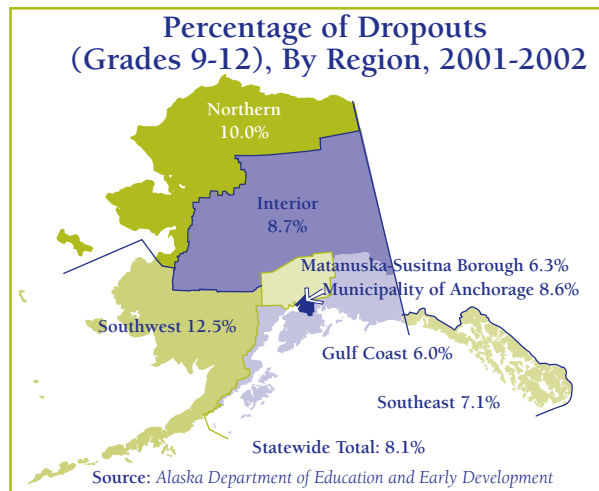
Among regions of the state in the 2001-02 school year, the dropout rate was highest in the Southwest (12.5 percent) and Northern (10 percent) parts of the state, and lowest (about 6 percent) in the Gulf Coast and Mat-Su regions.⁴

Alaska's dropout rate was highest among Native students in 2001-02, with almost 1 in 10 of those in grades 7 through 12 dropping out. Native students made up nearly 40 percent of all dropouts but less than 25 percent of all students. Black students also dropped out at disproportionately high rates, compared with their share of enrollment, while White and Asian students dropped out at lower rates.

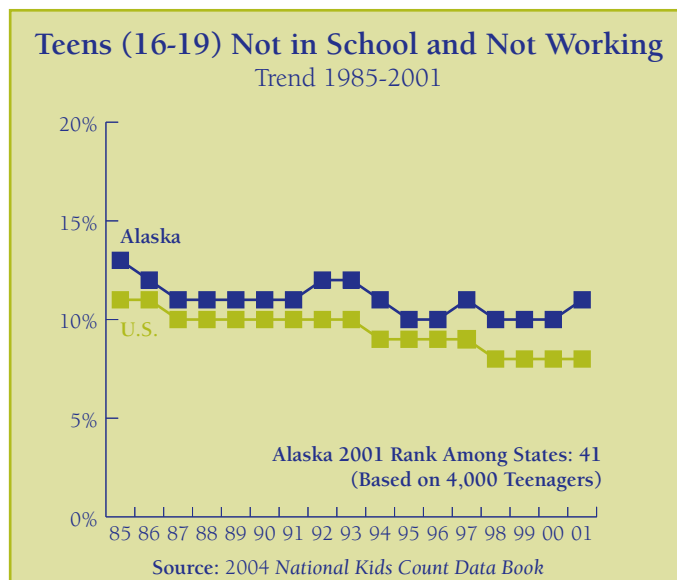
DEFINITION

The trend graph is based on the dropout definition in the national *Kids Count Data Book*: the share of teenagers 16 through 19 who are not enrolled in high school and have not graduated, based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Those who have general equivalency diplomas (GEDs) are considered graduates.

Alaska dropout rates by race and region are based on figures from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, which classifies dropouts as those who (1) left school without graduating or completing an approved program; (2) moved out of the school district or state and are not enrolled elsewhere; (3) enrolled in adult education programs or schools not approved by the district; or (4) were suspended or expelled and didn't return. The map shows dropout rates by region among those in grades 9 through 12. The bar chart shows dropout rates by race among those in grades 7 through 12.



Teens Not In School and Not Working



DEFINITION

This indicator measures the percentage of teenagers, ages 16 through 19, who are not in school, not in the military, and not working. It includes high-school dropouts as well as those who have either high-school diplomas or general equivalency diplomas (GEDs) but are not working. The numbers in the trend graph are three-year averages, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. So, for example, the 2001 figure of 11 percent for Alaska is the mid-point of the average of 2000, 2001, and 2002.

SIGNIFICANCE

Teenagers who are neither in school nor working are often referred to as "disconnected," because they aren't learning the skills they need to connect them to the work force or the community. Their future chances for higher education and better-paying jobs dwindle the longer they stay disconnected.⁵ Those who lack high-school diplomas face the same risks

we discussed in the Teens Who Drop Out indicator, as well as other risks. Research shows that teenagers who don't have enough support from their families, their schools, or their communities—for instance, teenagers who are in foster homes or who have been in the juvenile justice system—are especially at risk.⁶ Teenage girls who are neither in school nor in the work force are more likely to rely on welfare, and disconnected teenage boys are more likely to go to jail.⁷

DATA

About 11 percent of Alaska teenagers ages 16 to 19 were neither working nor attending school in 2001, compared with the U.S. average of 8 percent. Alaska has among the nation's highest share of "disconnected" teenagers. Since 1985, the percentage of Alaska teenagers not in school and not working has been as high as 13 percent and as low as 10 percent, but consistently above the national average.

PERCENTAGES OF U.S. TEENAGERS (16-19) NOT IN SCHOOL AND NOT WORKING, BY SEX AND RACE, 1994 AND 2003

	1994	2003	Percent Change
All 16-19	10%	8%	-20%
Teenage Girls*	11%	9%	-18%
Teenage Boys	8%	8%	Unchanged
White Teenagers	7%	6%	-14%
Black Teenagers	14%	12%	-14%
Hispanic Teenagers*	16%	12%	-25%

*Largest declines in individual groups

Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

Who is more likely to be a disconnected teenager—and are American teenagers becoming more or less likely to be idle? We don't have figures specifically for Alaska, but the table below shows national trends in the past decade.⁸

The share of all U.S. teenagers neither working nor in school declined from 10 percent to 8 percent between 1994 and 2003. In 1994 teenage girls were significantly more likely than boys to be disconnected—11 percent of girls, compared with 8 percent of boys. But the share of disconnected teenage girls dropped to 9 percent by 2003, while the share of disconnected teenage boys remained unchanged. So girls are still somewhat more likely to be disconnected, but the gap is much smaller than it was a decade ago.

Hispanic and Black teenagers were less likely to be disconnected in 2003 than in 1994, and the drop was especially large among Hispanic teenagers—from 16 percent to 12 percent. But both Black and Hispanic teenagers were still about twice as likely as White teenagers to be out of school and not working in 2003.

DEFINITION

There are various ways to measure school achievement; here we use test scores. To compare achievement of students in Alaska and nationwide, we use results of the California Achievement Test, sixth edition (TerraNova CAT/6). Alaska state regulations require students in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and ninth grades to take the CAT, and it is widely used in other states as well. It assesses skills in reading, math, and language arts.

CAT scores of all students nationwide are divided into four quartiles—so 25 percent score in the top quartile, 25 percent in the bottom quartile, and 50 percent in the two middle quartiles. The results from any given state show how well students in that state are doing relative to national averages. If less than 25 percent of students score in the top quartile, or more than 25 percent in the bottom quartile, then students in that state aren't doing as well as students nationwide.

We also present the results of the most recent Alaska High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam; as of spring 2004, Alaska students who fail this test can't receive high-school diplomas. Students first take the test in tenth grade and can repeat it until they pass. It tests reading, writing, and math proficiency.

DATA

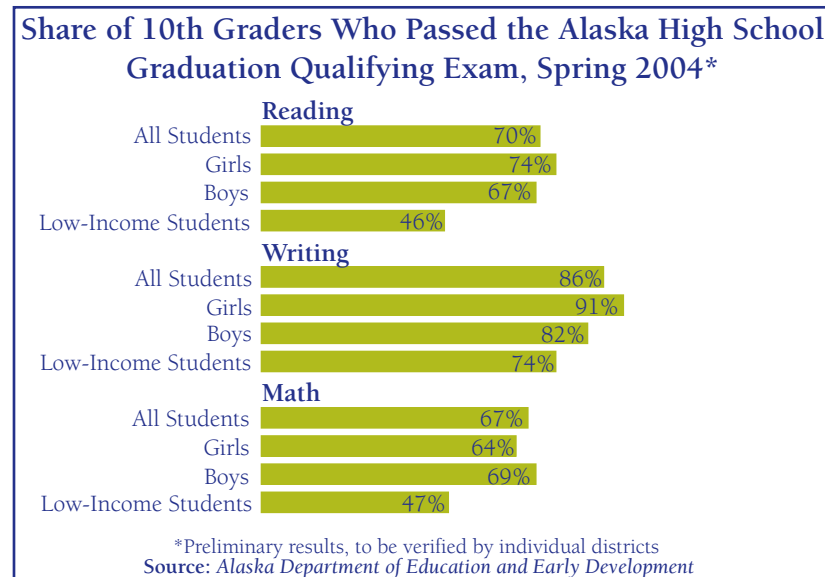
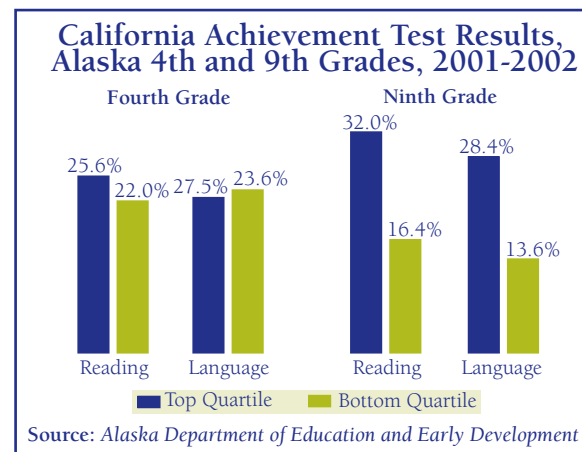
In the 2001-2002 school year, Alaska students in all grades tested scored above national averages in both the reading and language sections of the CAT. (Results of the math section were not available when we went to press.) And while Alaska students at all grade levels did better than the national average, those in the higher grades did best.

The adjacent figure shows CAT scores of Alaska students in the fourth and ninth grades in 2001-2002. In fourth grade, 26 percent of students scored in the top quartile and 22 percent in the bottom in reading. By ninth grade, 32 percent of Alaska students were in the top quartile and just 16 percent in the bottom. In the language section, about 28 percent of Alaska fourth graders were at the top and 24 percent at the bottom. By ninth grade, more than 28 percent were at the top and less than 14 percent were at the bottom.

Another critical test for Alaska students is the High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam. In the spring of 2004, more than 90 percent of tenth graders took the test; the graph below shows how many passed each section.

Among all students, 70 percent passed the reading section, 86 percent the writing section, and 67 percent the math section. Looked at another way, a third of Alaska tenth graders failed the reading and math sections and 14 percent failed the writing section.

The graph also breaks out scores of girls and boys and those of low-income students (defined as those whose families receive welfare payments or who qualify for free or reduced price school lunches). Girls scored higher than boys in reading and writing, with more than 90 percent of girls passing the writing section of the exam. Boys outscored girls in the math section.



School Achievement (continued)

Scores of low-income students were far below those of other students. Just over 45 percent of low-income students passed the reading and math sections and 74 percent the writing. As we discussed in the indicators Children With No Parent Working Full-Time and Children from Single Parent Families, research has shown that it is poverty, or near-poverty, that puts children at high risk of doing poorly in school and having a host of other problems.

Passing this exam is critical: Alaska students who don't pass all sections of the test by the time they're ready to graduate don't receive high-school diplomas but rather "certificates of achievement." This is a new state test, and it's unclear how colleges and employers will see certificates of achievement, as compared with high-school diplomas.

Endnotes for Education

¹U.S. Census Bureau, United States Department of Commerce News, March 21, 2003, Washington, D.C. See: www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2003/cb03-51.html

²U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education and Social Stratification Branch, Current Population Survey *Educational Attainment in the United States: March 2002*, Detailed Tables (PPL-169), Table 9. See: www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/ppl-169/tab09.pdf

³See, for example, discussion of rising dropout rates in Scott Goldsmith and others, *Status of Alaska Natives 2004*, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, May 2004, Chapter 6.

⁴Alaska detailed dropout data supplied by Erik McCormick, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.

⁵Rima Shore, *KIDS COUNT Indicator Brief: Reducing the Number of Disconnected Youth*. Baltimore, Maryland, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003.

⁶Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003*. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁷See note 5 above.

⁸Source of national trend data is the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.



Nancy Sadusky saw the hanging light in her dining room start to sway, but it didn't worry her. After all, earthquakes were pretty much the stuff of daily life in Seward, Alaska, and most rumbled on through without leaving any trace.

Story continues on back of page.



Children In Danger



Besides, Nancy was busy that day. It was just before Easter, and some fresh-baked rolls were cooling on a shelf above the counter. A bunch of hard-boiled eggs for her children to decorate sat on the counter, next to bowls of blue, red, yellow, and green dye.

But this time was different: the quaking went on and on, getting stronger instead of fading away. Eggs rolled off the counter, the shells shattering as they hit the floor and cabinets. The rolls fell from the shelf and into the bowls of egg dye—which then careened wildly around the kitchen, splashing the walls and ceiling.

Now Nancy was paying attention. She and her husband Jack quickly gathered their four children and got out of the house. It was March 27, 1964—Good Friday—and this would turn out to be the biggest earthquake ever recorded in the United States and close to the largest worldwide. It registered 9.2 on the Richter scale and was followed by a huge tsunami.

In the end, the Saduskys' house made it through the earthquake with limited damage, but they were without electricity for weeks and had no running water for months.

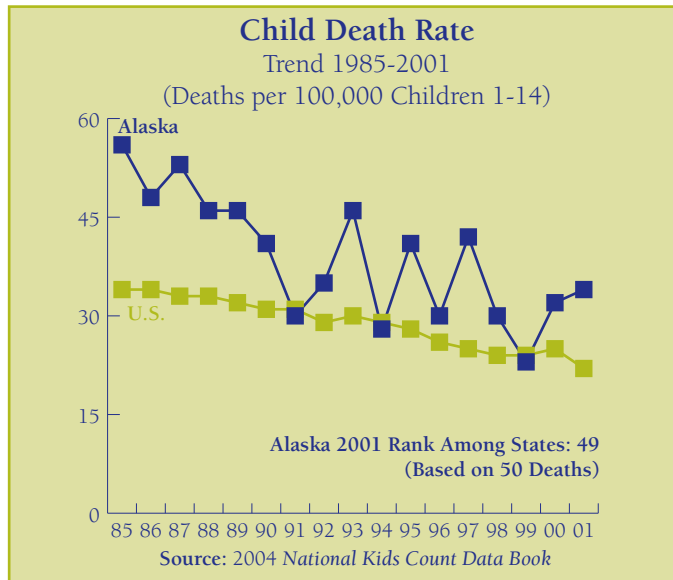
And within a day after the earthquake, Nancy was back in the kitchen—making sandwiches for 30 or so friends and neighbors who had ended up at the Saduskys' house. Some couldn't make it back to their own homes because of damage to roads and bridges; others had seen their houses washed into Resurrection Bay by the tsunami.

In 2004, Jack and Nancy Sadusky still live in Seward—in the same house that went through the earthquake. The only remaining telltale sign is a crack in a basement wall.

The 1964 Good Friday earthquake was epicentered in Prince William Sound, and it and the tsunami that followed—mostly the tsunami—killed 115 people in Seward, Valdez, Anchorage, Kodiak, and other southcentral communities.

The earthquake damaged or destroyed buildings, roads, bridges, rail lines, and harbors throughout the region. It also crippled Seward's economy, by destroying the city's port—which had been the major port in southcentral Alaska.

Alaska is earthquake country: more than 10 percent of all the earthquakes worldwide happen in Alaska. Roughly 5,000 earthquakes rumble the state every year. In the 40 years since the Good Friday earthquake, none has yet equalled its strength, although there have been some with magnitudes of 8. In 2002, an earthquake measuring 7.9 caused widespread damage to roads and structures in interior Alaska.



DEFINITION

The child death rate is the number of deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14, from all causes. Regional statistics are based on the child's place of residence. Manner of death information includes those ages 1 through 17.

SIGNIFICANCE

A big share of the Alaska children who die could be saved. Natural causes killed less than a third of those who died in recent years. Nearly half were killed by accidents. Alaska has historically had high rates of accidental death among both children and adults; the state's many waterways, vast stretches of rugged terrain and often harsh, unpredictable weather create dangerous conditions.

But rates of accidental death have come down, partly because of public campaigns stressing that life vests, helmets, and other safety gear can save children's lives.¹ The remaining deaths—close to one quarter of all

deaths among those under 18—were homicides and suicides. Perhaps not all those deaths could be stopped—but many could. In particular, Alaska's high rates of teenage suicide have led to several suicide-prevention campaigns.²

DATA

The child death rate in the U.S. has declined almost steadily over the past 15 years. The rate in Alaska has declined as well, but it remains among the highest in the country. It also fluctuates sharply from year to year, because it is based on a relatively small number of actual deaths—50 deaths in 2001, for example. So a slight change in the number of deaths can make a significant difference in the rate of death in a given year. Calculating an average rate over a five-year period (as we do in the regional graph) helps smooth out those year-to-year fluctuations.

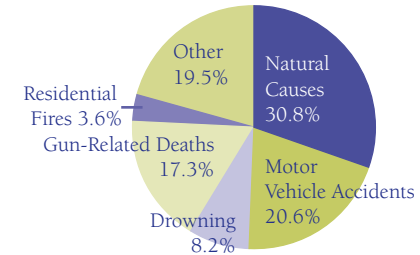
From 1997 through 2001, the death rate among Alaska children averaged 32 per 100,000 children. But the rate varied sharply among regions, with the rate in the Northern and Southwest regions seven times that in Southeast Alaska.

Most young children (1-9) who died in recent years were killed by natural causes or accidents. Still, 1 in 10 of the very young children (under 5) who died were murdered. Among older children (10-17) almost a third of the deaths were murders or suicides.

How Do Alaska Children Die?

(Ages 1-17, 5-Year Average, 1997-2001)

Causes of Death (In Percentages)



Manner of Death

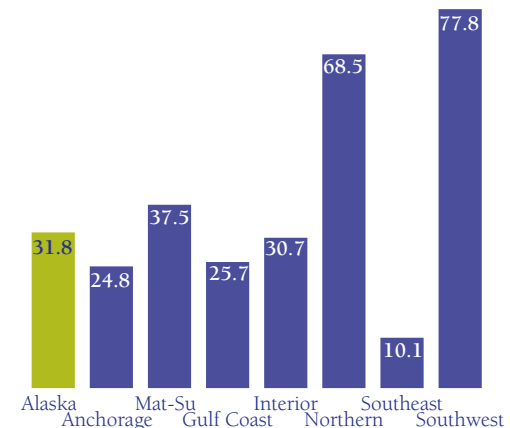
(Number of Deaths, by Age, 1997-2001)

	1-4	5-9	10-17	Total	Percent
Natural Causes	45	21	46	112	30.8%
Accidents	36	27	93	156	42.9%
Suicides	0	1	53	54	14.8%
Homicides	10	3	16	29	8.0%
Other	5	1	7	13	3.6%
Total	96	53	215	364	100%

Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

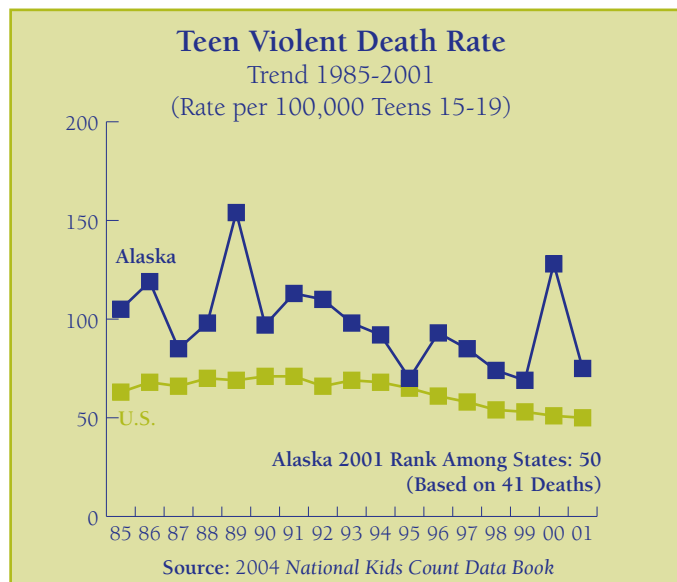
Child Death Rate By Region

(Deaths per 100,000 Children Ages 1-14)
5-Year Average, 1997-2001



Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

Teen Violent Deaths



DEFINITION

The trend graph above shows the number of violent deaths (from accidents, homicides, and suicides) per 100,000 teenagers 15 to 19.

SIGNIFICANCE

As we discussed in the Child Death Rate indicator, many of these violent deaths are accidental and could be prevented if teenagers used life vests, helmets, and other safety gear. But the suicide rate among Alaska teenagers—especially Native teenagers—is very high and worrisome. Suicide's toll on families, friends, and neighbors is enormous; that's especially so in small Alaska communities. One particularly worrisome possibility is that children who grow up in places where violent deaths are common may come to see such deaths as inevitable, rather than preventable.

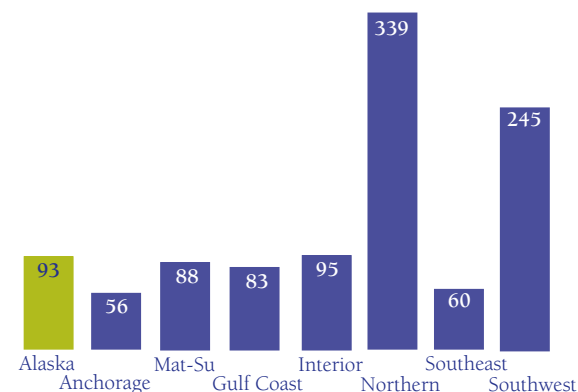
In late 2004, Alaska's governor, Frank Murkowski, and the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council will release a suicide prevention plan. The plan will describe the scope of the problem, list goals for suicide prevention, and provide tools communities can use to stop young people—as well as older Alaskans—from killing themselves. Through late 2004, the draft plan will be available on the Web site of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.³

DATA

Alaska's rate of teen violent death is consistently among the highest in the nation, but in most recent years it has been lower than it was in the 1980s and early 1990s. The exception was in 2000, when it spiked to 128 deaths per 100,000 teenagers; in 2001 the rate dropped to 75 per 100,000. Keep in mind that Alaska's rates are based on a relatively small number of deaths, and a change in the number of deaths can make a big difference in the rate. For example, the high rate in 2000 was based on 64 deaths; the much lower rate in 2001 was based on 41 deaths.

To help reduce the effects of year-to-year fluctuations, we use 5-year averages when calculating the regional rates shown in the bar graph above. From 1997 through 2001, the violent death rate among Alaska's teenagers averaged 93 per 100,000.⁴ But that rate varied sharply by region, with rates in the Northern

Teen Violent Death Rate, By Region
(Rate per 100,000 Teens, 5-Year Average, 1997-2001)



Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

and Southwest regions several times higher than in Anchorage or Southeast Alaska.

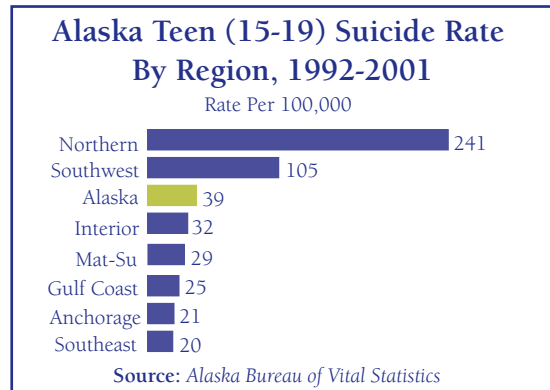
Accidents made up 53 percent of all violent deaths among Alaska teenagers from 1997 through 2001, suicides another 39 percent, and homicides 8 percent.⁵ Again, rates of specific types of death varied considerably among regions, with a lower-than-average rate of accidental death in Anchorage and an especially high rate of suicides in the Northern region. But remember that the actual numbers of regional deaths are very small—given that the statewide numbers themselves are small—so a slight change in the numbers can cause a big change in the rates.

TEEN SUICIDE IN ALASKA

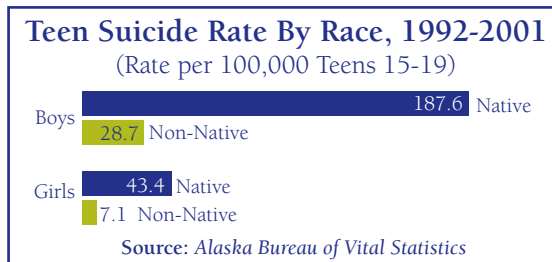
As we said at the outset, rates of suicide among Alaska’s teenagers—especially Native teenage boys—are very high. From 1992 through 2001, 174 teenagers took their own lives. Half of those suicides were among just Native teenage boys. To put that in perspective, remember that only about 22 percent of Alaska’s teenagers are Native.⁶

The bar graph below shows how those grim numbers translate into rates per 100,000. The rate among Native teenage boys was almost 188 per 100,000; the rate among Native girls was over 43 per 100,000. That compares with nearly 29 per 100,000 among non-Native boys and about 7 among non-Native girls.

So the suicide rate among Native teenage boys over the past decade was more than six times higher than that among non-Native boys. The rate among Native teenage girls was also about six times that of non-Native girls—and about 1.5 times that of non-Native boys.



The bar graph above shows suicide rates by region of Alaska for the same period—from 1992 through 2001. That rate was vastly different around the state, with Anchorage’s rate about half the statewide average and the rate in the Northern region more than six times higher. Those rates by region correspond with what we know about teen suicides by race: the Northern and the Southwest regions are predominantly Alaska Native.



Child Abuse and Neglect

DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Child abuse or neglect exists when parents or other adult guardians hurt or endanger—physically or mentally—children in their care, or fail to protect them from such harm. Nationwide every year, hundreds of children, especially the youngest and most vulnerable (those under age 5), are killed by abuse. Thousands more are seriously hurt, and many of them suffer lifelong disabilities.

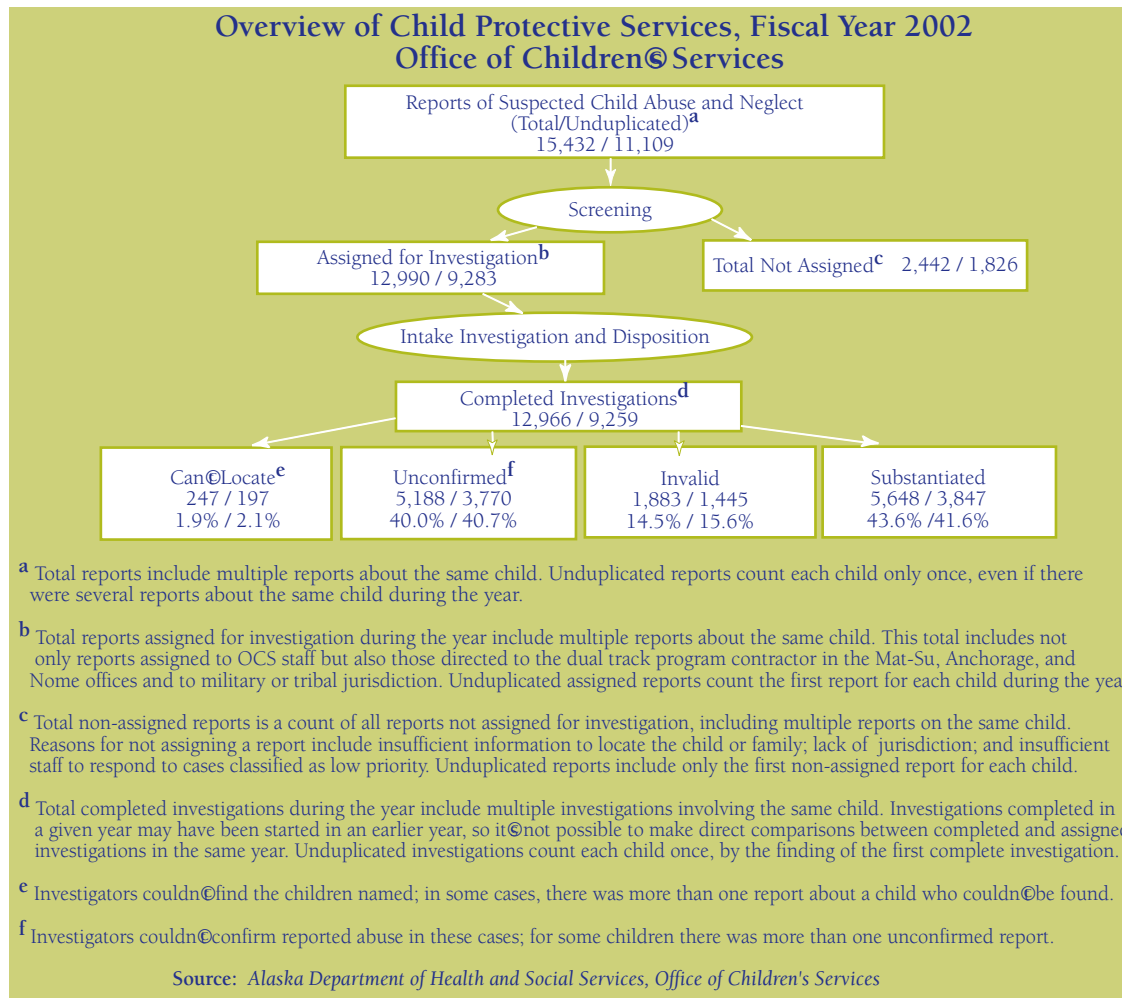
Remember that we don't know how many children are in fact abused or neglected; we only know how many suspected cases of abuse are reported and investigated.

INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES AND STATISTICS

The Office of Children's Services (formerly the Division of Family and Youth Services) in the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services investigates reports of suspected child abuse and neglect in Alaska. Anyone who believes a child is in danger can file a report with the office, which assigns investigation priority by assessing the potential risk to the child.

The office received 15,432 total and 11,109 unduplicated reports of abuse in fiscal year 2002. Total reports include multiple (duplicated) reports of suspected harm to the same child. Unduplicated counts include each child only once, even if there are several reports concerning the same child. Total reports measure the agency's workload; unduplicated reports show the number of individual children who may have suffered abuse.

Not all reports of abuse are substantiated. The flow chart shows that of the 12,966 investigations completed in fiscal year 2002, about 44 percent found substantiated harm.



Another 40 percent of completed investigations found "unconfirmed" harm, meaning investigators were unable to determine whether children had in fact been abused or neglected. About 15 percent of investigations completed in 2002 found no evidence of abuse ("invalid" reports). In the remaining 2 percent of investigations, the children who had been reported as abused couldn't be found.

CHILD ABUSE BY TYPE

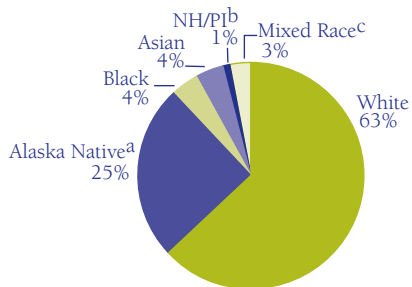
As the facing page shows, neglect was the most frequent type of substantiated child abuse in Alaska between 1998 and 2002, with an annual average of about 14 in 1,000 Alaskan children being neglected, 5 per 1,000 children physically abused, and about 2 per 1,000 sexually abused or mentally injured.

CHILD ABUSE BY RACE

Alaska Native and Black children are the most likely to be the subjects of reports of neglect or abuse. Native children make up about 25 percent of the children in Alaska (as the pie graph shows), but suffered approximately half the substantiated abuse in recent years. Black children account for about 4 percent of children statewide but close to 7 percent of substantiated abuse.

We can't report current rates of abuse by race, because in mid-2004 the state Office of Children's Services was still in the process of setting up a system to account for the more complex racial identifications from the 2000 federal census. That census allowed respondents, for the first time, to report being of more than one race.⁷

Racial Composition of Alaska Children



^aIncludes Native alone and in combination with other races
^bNative Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders
^cExcept children of Native and other race, who are included in "Alaska Native."

Source: 2000 U.S. census, adjusted by Alaska Department of Labor

**SUBSTANTIATED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN ALASKA BY RACE AND TYPE OF ABUSE
 (ANNUAL AVERAGE FY 1998-2002, UNDUPLICATED CASES, CHILDREN UNDER 18)**

	Neglect #	Physical Abuse #	Sexual Abuse #	Mental Injury #	Abandonment #	Total ^a #	%
White	60	364	126	162	0.8	1,213	34%
AK Native	1,319	80	102	113	5	1,819	50%
Black	141	64	12	34	0.4	251	7%
Asian/PI	42	35	6	11	0	95	3%
Hispanic/Other ^b	103	61	22	40	0.4	227	6%
Total	2,164	806	269	360	6	3,605	100%

^aAs of November 2003

^bOCS figures report Hispanic as a racial group; the U.S. census considers Hispanic as an ethnic group within other races.

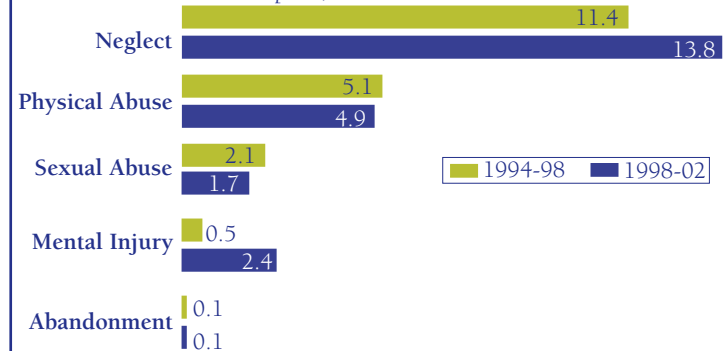
Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services

TRENDS IN CHILD ABUSE

The bar graph compares annual average rates of abuse, by type, among Alaska children in the periods 1994-1998 and 1998-2002. It appears that rates of neglect may have increased, while rates of physical and sexual abuse may have declined. However, as we've noted elsewhere, rates based on the relatively small numbers of children in Alaska can fluctuate. We will feel more confident about trends as we get additional data. The increase in rates of mental injury is in part the result of a change in definition.

Rate of Substantiated Abuse Among Alaska Children, By Type of Abuse
 (Annual Average, 1994-1998 and 1998-2002)

Rate per 1,000 Children under 18



Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services

Child Injuries

DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

In this indicator we look at serious and fatal injuries among Alaska children through age 19; “serious” here means requiring hospitalization. Injuries can be either accidental or intentional, but hospitalizations or deaths resulting from illnesses are excluded.

The National Health Account estimates that nationwide in 2000, medical treatment for serious injuries among children and teenagers cost \$19 billion.⁸ Fortunately, rates of accidental injury and death among children nationwide and in Alaska have declined in the past 20 years.

Still, injury rates remain high in Alaska, especially in rural areas and especially among Alaska Native children. Alaska’s rugged terrain, often dangerous waterways, and harsh climate do pose special hazards for children and adults. But simple steps—like requiring children to wear life vests when they’re in boats—could prevent a lot of injuries.

DATA

Accidents were by far the leading cause of death among Alaska’s children in the period 1996-2000, and motor vehicle accidents killed more children than any other single cause.⁹ Deaths from suicide and assault ranked second and third as causes of injury death.

Falls were the leading cause of serious (but non-fatal) injuries to children in much of the state in 2000, as was also true nationwide.¹⁰ But in four areas—the Northwest Arctic, Norton Sound, Kodiak,

and the Fairbanks borough—suicide attempts hospitalized more teenagers than any other single cause. In the Bristol Bay and Copper River regions, snowmachine and ATV accidents were the leading cause of injuries. Other statistics reported by government agencies include:

- Alaska Native children and teenagers have an accidental death rate 2.4 times higher than the rate among non-Native children.¹¹
- Suicide rates are six times higher, and attempted suicide rates four to five times higher, among Native teenagers than among non-Natives.¹²

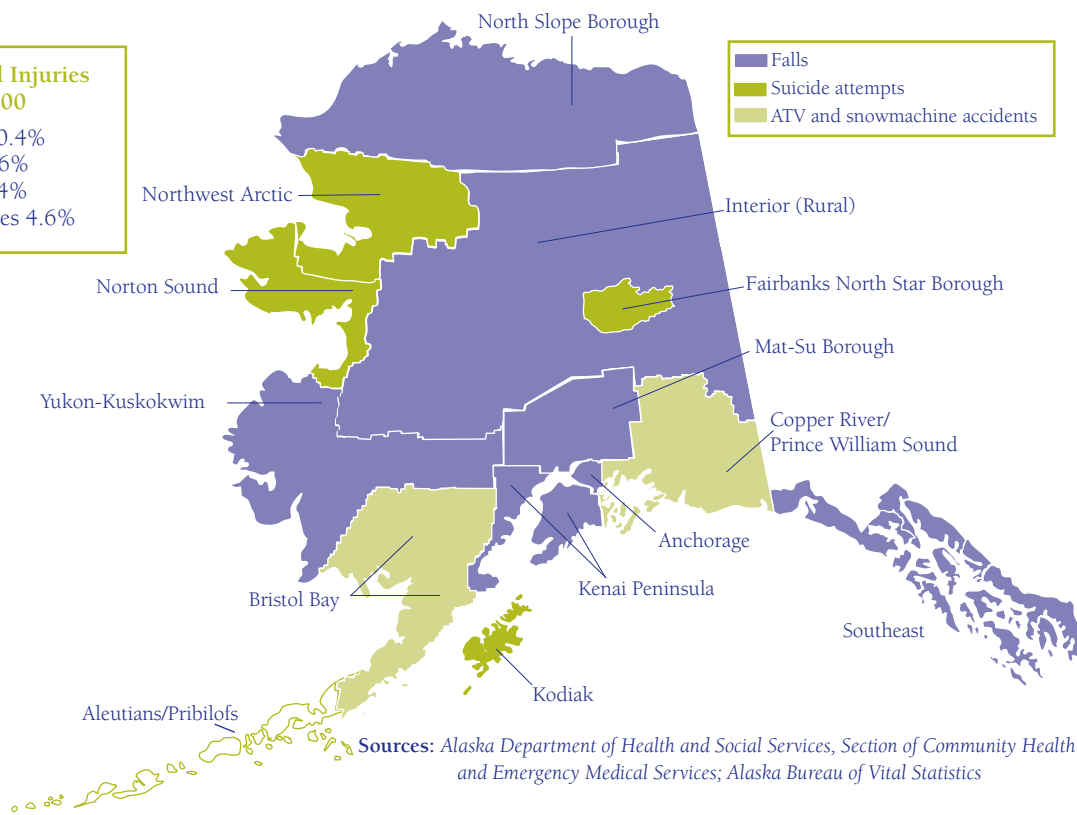
• Children in rural Alaska are killed by ATV, snowmachine, and boating accidents at rates more than four times higher than children living in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau.¹³

• American Indian and Alaska Native children have the highest unintentional injury death rate in the nation, with Black children a close second.¹⁴

Leading Causes of Serious (Non-Fatal) Injury, Alaskans 19 and Under, By Region, 2000

Causes of Fatal Injuries 1996-2000

1. Accidents 60.4%
2. Suicide 22.6%
3. Assault 12.4%
4. Other Causes 4.6%



DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sponsors national and state Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, which monitor things high-school students do that can risk their health or cause injuries. The survey asks teenagers to report their use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs; their sexual activity; their use of seatbelts and other safety measures; their levels of physical activity; and their involvement in fighting or carrying weapons.

This survey provides the most comprehensive information available about teenage behavior. The survey results not only show levels of and trends in risky behavior among teenagers, but also provide information that school districts, health organizations, and others can use to try to reduce such behavior.

DATA

Alaska school districts statewide took part in Youth Risk Behavior Surveys in 1995 and 2003.¹⁵ The figures on this and the facing page compare 1995 and 2003 Alaska survey results and 2001 national results.

The news about Alaska high-school students is mostly good, in the sense that it shows falling levels of several kinds of risky behavior. Still, many Alaska teenagers still smoke, drink, carry weapons, and do other things that put them or other people at risk.

- The share of Alaska students who drink dropped from 48 percent to 39 percent between 1995 and 2003—so by 2003, Alaska students were considerably less likely to drink than students nationwide.

- Use of inhalants—like gasoline fumes—among Alaska high-school students dropped by more than half in less than 10 years. In 2003, about 10 percent of Alaska students had ever used inhalants, compared with 15 percent nationwide.
- Marijuana use among Alaska students also dropped, with current users dropping from 29 to 24 percent between 1995 and 2003. Students nationwide and in Alaska are about equally likely to use marijuana.
- Smoking dropped nearly 50 percent among Alaska students, with current smokers down from 37 percent in 1995 to 19 percent in 2003. Students nationwide are now significantly more likely to smoke than Alaskans.

- Alaska teenagers were less likely to have sex and more likely to use condoms in 2003 than in 1995. That corresponds with national trends that analysts cite as bringing down the teen birth rate.¹⁶
- Carrying weapons and fighting were less prevalent among Alaska teenagers—both boys and girls—in 2003. Still, almost a third of high-school boys said they had carried weapons in the month before the survey and more than a third had been in fights in the previous year.
- Most Alaska students use seatbelts when they ride in cars, but a sizeable share—15 percent in 2003—don't.
- Use of bicycle helmets among high-school students did increase in recent years. But in 2003, 74 percent of Alaska students and 85 percent of students nationwide still reported that they rarely or never wore bike helmets.

Tobacco, Drug, and Alcohol Use Among High-School Students, Alaska and U.S., 1995 and 2003

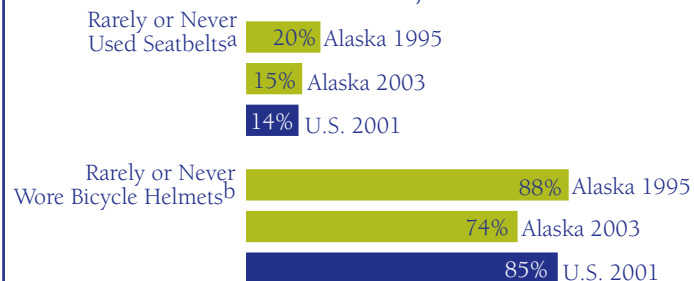


*At least once in past 30 days

Source: Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003

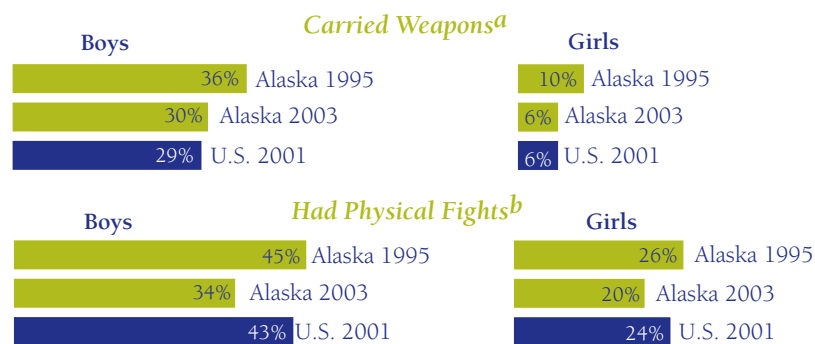
Youth Risk Behavior (continued)

Helmet and Seatbelt Use Among High-School Students, 1995 and 2003, Alaska and U.S.



^aRiding in car driven by someone else. ^bAmong those who rode bicycles in previous year.
Source: Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003

Carrying Weapons and Fighting, High-School Students, 1995 and 2003, Alaska and U.S.



^aWithin past 30 days ^bWithin past 12 months
Source: Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003

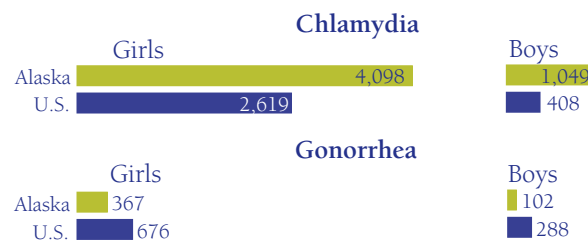
SEXUALLY-TRANSMITTED DISEASES AMONG TEENAGERS

Alaska had the highest rate of chlamydia in the nation in 2003, and the rate was especially high among teenagers and young adults. Chlamydia is a sexually-transmitted bacterial infection that often has no symptoms, but if left untreated can cause pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility in women. Girls 15 to 19 in Alaska had chlamydia at a rate of nearly 4,100 per 100,000 in 2003, compared with a rate of about 2,600 among teenage girls nationwide. Teenage boys in Alaska had chlamydia at a much lower rate—about 1,050 per 100,000—but that rate was still more than double the rate among boys nationwide.

By contrast, teenagers in Alaska are only about half as likely as teenagers nationwide to have gonorrhea, another sexually-transmitted bacterial infection that can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and fertility problems if left untreated. Again, rates are highest among teenagers and young adults. As the figure below shows, girls 15 to 19 in Alaska had gonorrhea at a rate of 367 per 100,000, compared with 676 per 100,000 among girls nationwide. Among boys 15 to 19, the gonorrhea rate in Alaska was 102 per 100,000, compared with 288 per 100,000 nationwide.

Chlamydia and Gonorrhea Rates Alaska and U.S. Teenagers, 2003*

(Rates per 100,000 teens ages 15-19)



*National figures are for 2002; 2003 figures are not yet available.

Sources: Alaska Epidemiology Bulletin #13 and #14; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of STD Prevention.

¹In particular, rates of accidental death among Alaska Natives have declined in recent years; see Scott Goldsmith and others, *Status of Alaska Natives 2004*, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, pages 3-20 to 3-22.

²See, for example, the Statewide Council on Suicide Prevention's draft plan at: www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention

³See note 2 above.

⁴We use Alaska's most current population estimates as the basis for calculating the five-year averages; the resulting rates are somewhat different from the national Kids Count calculations for Alaska.

⁵Information on numbers and rates of violent death within Alaska provided by Mike Matthews, an analyst with the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics.

⁶Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section, *Alaska Population Overview: 2001-2002 Estimates*, page 38.

⁷The Office of Children's Services plans to have a new database system in place by late 2004. For a discussion of the expanded race categories from the 2000 census, see *Status of Alaska Natives in 2004* (full citation in note 1), Appendix A.

⁸National Health Accounts, *Medical Expenditures Attributable to Injuries—United States, 2000*, MMWR Weekly, January 16, 2004/ 53(01); 1-4. These estimates include the U.S. based military and institutionalized populations and are calculated by multiplying the NHA estimate of U.S. medical expenditures in 2000 by the percentage of medical expenditures attributable to injuries, estimated by the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey.

⁹Personal communication from Phillip Mitchell, Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics.

¹⁰National Safe Kids Campaign, *Report to the Nation: Trends in Unintentional Childhood Injury Mortality, 1987-2000*, May 2003.

¹¹Division of Public Health, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, "Injury Disparities in Alaska," in *Alaska Injury Facts* No. 1, May 2003.

¹²Alaska Area Native Health Service, *Special Reports: Key Facts*, August 2001.

¹³Division of Public Health, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, "Children's Injury Disparities in Alaska," in *Alaska Injury Facts* No. 2, May 2003.

¹⁴U.S. Indian Health Service, *Trends in Indian Health 1997* Washington, D.C. 1997.

¹⁵Many Alaska school districts did take part in a survey in 1999, but the Anchorage School District did not. Because more than 40 percent of the state's students attend Anchorage schools, the 1999 survey results didn't provide a representative state sample.

¹⁶See figure in Teen Birth Rate indicator.

HOW IS ALASKA WORKING TO PREVENT INJURIES TO CHILDREN?

To help make Alaska children safer, the Alaska Section of Community Health and Emergency Medical Services sponsors a number of educational programs and provides safety equipment.

- The Child Passenger Safety program offers child-safety seat inspections, provides education workshops for public health groups, and distributes child-safety seats to Medicaid-eligible children.
- The Injury Prevention In A Bag program trains community health aides, public health nurses, and others who may visit homes for medical purposes to also show families ways to make their homes safer and to distribute electrical outlet covers, door latches, and smoke detectors.
- The Kids Don't Float program is designed to prevent children from drowning and to increase public awareness about water safety. Program officials report that the program operates at 370 sites around Alaska and that it has saved at least nine lives since 1998. The program loans children life vests, at no charge, at harbors and boat ramps. It also provides water safety training to high-school students, who in turn offer water safety classes to elementary school children.

For more information on children's safety programs, go to the Injury Prevention Web site: http://www.chems.alaska.gov/Injury_Prevention/default.htm



Jim and Linda Reinhart's children knew they had to be ready for anything, whenever they climbed into their parents' small plane for a trip across Kachemak Bay. They might, for instance, have to pack lumber for a cabin up a mountain-side, or spend the day fishing in the rain. But when their cousin Molly Ridout visited from Louisiana, they knew Alaska hospitality would guarantee them an easier time.

Story continued on the back of the page.



Juvenile Crime



The Reinharts lived in Homer, at the tip of the Kenai Peninsula. But like many Alaskans, they had one foot in town and the other in the great Alaska beyond.

They had arrived in Alaska in the late 1960s and invested in a small plane that gave them a ticket to the hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping just a short flight away, in the Kenai Peninsula wilderness. The meat and fish they brought home made up a big part of the food on the table for their growing family.

Visiting in the 1980s, 11-year-old Molly heard many stories from her cousins—stories of long hikes and huge packs; of days spent fishing in downpours; of steep climbs up and wicked descents from apparently endless mountains.

But as the out-of-town guest, she was treated to trips that were purely for the enjoyment of glorious long summer days. Then her uncle would take her and her cousins sightseeing over glaciers and land so Molly could pick wild roses. Or they would spend the day beachcombing for treasures like glass floats that had washed ashore from ocean-going trawlers.

Memories of childhood trips helped draw Molly Ridout back to Alaska, and today she and her husband live outside Anchorage. Her aunt and uncle still live in Homer, as do several of her cousins.

Alaskans were quick to see the advantages of small airplanes for crossing the state's vast, roadless distances, and Anchorage got its first airport in the 1920s. Today, Alaska has seven times the pilots per capita and 14 times the planes per capita as the U.S. as a whole.

DEFINITION

The tables and figures in this section are calculated with data from the Division of Juvenile Justice in the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. They are based on delinquency referrals, which include police reports and notices of probation violations. This information shows juvenile crime in Alaska, both violent and other. Keep in mind that while these delinquency referrals are the best measure we have of “juvenile crime,” a referral is not the same as proof of guilt. Almost all the juveniles in the state’s juvenile justice system at any given time are ages 10-17; about 1 percent are under 10 and 3 percent are over 17.¹

SIGNIFICANCE

A recent report by the American Youth Policy Forum, *Less Hype, More Help: Reducing Juvenile Crime*, described the severity of juvenile crime in the United States and examined programs around the country that help prevent juvenile crime.² The report found that while rates of juvenile crime have been declining nationwide, Americans still have a number of reasons to be concerned:

- Crime rates are highest among teenagers and young adults.
- Numbers of young people in America are growing.
- Rates of violence among American teenagers are higher than among teenagers in other democracies.
- Many of the causes of delinquency—membership in gangs and exposure to drugs, for example—remain widespread.

The report also outlined what kinds of measures and programs help reduce or prevent juvenile crime:

- Working with young children before problems develop, through pre-school programs, home visits, assistance to parents, and other measures.
- Offering prevention programs in schools; for example, programs to combat bullying and to teach grade-school children how to curb aggressive behavior and develop social skills.
- Enrolling children who behave violently or have other social problems in proven treatment programs; to be most effective, these programs must involve both children and their parents.
- Providing after-school activities for both children and teenagers; such activities can range from recreation programs to classes that help improve grades to opportunities to spend time with mentors.

The report concludes with some recommendations:

- Invest more in community-based services for juvenile delinquents, rather than devoting so much money to juvenile detention centers and training schools. Only about 10 percent of delinquents are sent to detention centers, but such centers account for most spending for juvenile justice. Putting more money and effort into community-based services could help prevent large numbers of juvenile delinquents from going on to commit more serious crimes.

- Collect data on what measures really reduce juvenile crime—and then use the research results to establish programs, rather than relying on practices that are common but often ineffective.
- Monitor how government-funded programs are working and cut off funds for those that are ineffective.
- Bring communities into the fight against juvenile crime. Research has shown that the juveniles most likely to commit crimes are those with no adults who care about them and those who have no positive activities to focus their energies on. Communities need to develop strategies for preventing juvenile crime, and government agencies dealing with juvenile crime should try to build partnerships with community residents and organizations.

DATA

In both Alaska and the nation as a whole, juvenile crime has dropped significantly since the mid-1990s. National figures show a 20 percent decline in the number of juvenile arrests between 1997 and 2001, with declines in almost all types of crime, including murder and other violent crimes.³

On average, Alaska’s Division of Juvenile Justice received about 7,500 referrals a year in the period 1998 through 2002. The rate of *individual juveniles* cited in referrals was 57 per 1,000. Put another way, roughly 5 to 6 percent of Alaskans ages 10 to 17 were referred to the juvenile justice system in recent years. The rate of *juvenile crime* (which counts multiple referrals of the same juvenile) was 85 per 1,000, or 8 to 9 percent.

Juvenile Crime (continued)

Juvenile Crime in Alaska, 1998-2002 and 1993-1997

(Referral Rates per 1,000 Juveniles 10-17)



Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Juvenile Justice

As the figure shows, the rate of individual Alaska juveniles committing crimes was about 20 percent lower from 1998-2002 than it was from 1993-1997. The average number of juvenile crime reports was also down about 20 percent in the most recent period.

As is true nationwide, boys in Alaska are much more likely to commit crimes than are girls. Roughly three-quarters of the juveniles referred to the Division of Juvenile Justice from 1998 through 2002 were boys.

The table showing crimes by region and type in Alaska is a measure of *total* juvenile crime, because it is based on all referrals (including multiple referrals of the same juvenile). Crimes against property are the most common, accounting for 53 percent of annual referrals from 1998-2002. Crimes against persons made up 21 percent of juvenile crime statewide, and violations of drug and alcohol laws accounted for 9 percent. Various other crimes accounted for the remaining 17 percent of juvenile crimes statewide; many of these were violations of probation, but they also included violations of weapons laws and public order laws.

The breakdown of juvenile crime by region in Alaska from 1998-2002 was similar to the breakdown statewide. Crimes against property were the most common crimes in all regions, accounting for roughly 50 to 60 percent of the annual total. Crimes against persons made up close to 20 percent of crimes in most regions, with a low of 18 percent in Anchorage and a high of 33 percent in the Southwest region.

Violations of drug and alcohol laws ranged from 4 percent in the Southwest and Northern

regions to 15 percent in the Interior. Other crimes—including violations of probation—made up anywhere from 11 or 12 percent of crimes in the Mat-Su and Southwest regions to almost 22 percent of crimes in Anchorage.

The table on the facing page, showing the share of juvenile delinquents by region and race, is a measure of *individual* crime—that is, in any given year it includes specific juveniles only once, regardless of how many times they were referred to the juvenile justice system. (However, a juvenile who committed crimes in more than one year—for example, 2000 and 2002—would be included in each of those years.)

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY REFERRALS^a BY REGION AND TYPE OF CRIME

(ANNUAL AVERAGE, FISCAL YEARS 1998-2002^b)

Region	Crimes Against Persons		Crimes Against Property		Drug/Alcohol Laws		Other ^c		Total ^d	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Anchorage	560	18.3%	1,599	52.2%	241	7.9%	663	21.7%	3,063	100%
Mat-Su	110	19.5%	333	59.1%	54	9.6%	66	11.8%	563	100%
Gulf Coast	159	20.0%	436	54.9%	74	9.3%	125	15.8%	794	100%
Interior	218	23.4%	449	48.2%	135	14.5%	130	13.9%	932	100%
Northern	137	22.2%	356	57.8%	26	4.3%	97	15.8%	616	100%
Southeast	182	20.2%	472	52.3%	93	10.3%	156	17.3%	903	100%
Southwest	202	33.4%	315	51.9%	24	4.0%	65	10.8%	606	100%
Alaska	1,568	21.0%	3,960	52.9%	647	8.7%	1,302	17.41%	7,477	100%

^a These are duplicate counts—meaning they include multiple referrals of the same juvenile; duplicated counts show the overall level of reported juvenile crime. Referrals include police reports and notices of probation violations. Juveniles charged with more than one type of crime in a single referral are included in only one category, with crimes against persons ranked first, property crimes second, drug and alcohol crimes third, and other crimes fourth.

^b The state fiscal year is from July 1 through June 30.

^c Includes probation violations, violations of public order and weapons laws, and miscellaneous other offenses.

^d Annual average number of crimes.

Note: Percentages may total slightly more or less than 100 because of rounding.

Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Juvenile Justice

TOTAL JUVENILES REFERRED TO JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM, BY RACE AND REGION, FISCAL YEARS 1998-2002^a

Region	Native	Black	White	NH/ Pacific Isl.	Asian	More Than One Race	Other	Unknown	Total 1998-02
Anchorage	16.9%	12.6%	58.3%	6.3%	1.7%	3.2%	0.5%	0.5%	10,217
Mat-Su	5.9%	1.0%	88.5%	0.2%	—	1.9%	0.2%	2.4%	2,039
Gulf Coast	12.9%	0.9%	77.0%	0.4%	3.4%	1.5%	0.7%	3.2%	2,735
Interior	30.4%	8.1%	57.2%	0.1%	0.5%	0.8%	0.2%	2.7%	3,107
Northern	89.8%	0.8%	3.6%	0.6%	0.3%	1.8%	0.3%	2.9%	1,858
Southeast	37.3%	0.9%	47.7%	0.6%	0.8%	2.5%	0.5%	9.8%	3,002
Southwest	90.5%	0.3%	6.8%	0.3%	0.1%	1.1%	0.3%	0.7%	2,032
Alaska	31.1%	6.5%	53.1%	2.8%	1.3%	2.2%	0.4%	2.5%	24,990

^aThis is an unduplicated count of all individual juveniles referred to Alaska's juvenile justice system from 1998 through 2002. Race is self-reported by juvenile offenders; persons of Hispanic origin can be of any race.

Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Juvenile Justice.

Statewide for the period 1998-2002, about 53 percent of the reported juvenile delinquents were White; 31 percent were Alaska Native; 6.5 percent were Black; close to 3 percent were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders; 1 percent were Asian; and just over 2 percent were of more than one race. About half a percent of juveniles committing crimes classified themselves as "Other," rejecting all the racial groups

listed, and another 2.5 percent were "Unknown," because they didn't report a race.

So how do the shares of crime among juveniles of various races compare with their shares of the total juvenile population (ages 10 to 19), shown in the adjacent table? Statewide in recent years, Alaska Native, Black, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island juveniles were reported for crimes at higher rates than their representation in the total juvenile population, and White and Asian juveniles at lower rates. That pattern also generally held in the various regions of the state, although in the Mat-Su and Gulf Coast regions White juveniles were reported for crimes at about the same levels as their share of the total population.

ALASKA POPULATION, AGES 10-19, BY RACE AND REGION, 2000

Region	Native ^a	Black	White	NH/ Pacific Isl.	Asian	More Than ^b One Race
Anchorage	13.1%	7.1%	68.7%	1.5%	6.2%	3.4%
Mat-Su	11.4%	0.6%	85.6%	0.2%	0.6%	1.5%
Gulf Coast	14.9%	0.5%	78.6%	0.4%	4.1%	1.5%
Interior	19.2%	5.4%	71.0%	0.3%	1.7%	2.3%
Northern	89.9%	0.2%	7.7%	0.4%	1.2%	0.7%
Southeast	29.3%	0.5%	64.6%	0.3%	3.7%	1.6%
Southwest	87.1%	0.3%	10.7%	0.1%	1.2%	0.5%
Alaska	24.3%	3.8%	65.0%	0.7%	3.8%	2.3%

^a Includes all those who described themselves in the 2000 U.S. census as Alaska Native alone or Alaska Native and some other race. Also includes American Indians, who make up about 0.5 percent of Alaska's population.

^b Includes all those who described themselves as being of more than one race, except Alaska Natives and American Indians, who are included under "Native."

Source: 2000 U.S. census figures, adjusted by Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Endnotes for Juvenile Crime

¹A few of those in the juvenile justice system at any given time are over 18, mostly because they committed crimes before they turned 18 and remain on probation or otherwise within the juvenile justice system. Also, those under 18 who commit certain violent crimes can be charged as adults and go through the adult court system, but numbers of juveniles tried as adults are very small.

²Richard A. Mendel, *Less Hype, More Help: Reducing Juvenile Crime: What Works—and What Doesn't*. American Youth Policy Forum; supported by Walter S. Johnson Foundation, 2000. Published in partnership with National Urban League, Child Welfare League of America, National Crime Prevention Council, Coalition for Juvenile Justice, National League of Cities, and National Collaboration for Youth. Available at: www.aypf.org/mendel/index.html

³U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "Juvenile Arrests 2001," in *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, December 2003.