

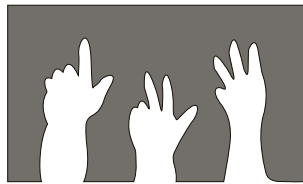


# *Kids Count Alaska 2008*

*University of Alaska Anchorage • Institute of Social and Economic Research*



# *Kids Count Alaska 2008*



**kids  
count**

## **2008 Data Book**

**Prepared by Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER),  
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The printing of this book was paid for by a generous grant from The Children's Hospital at Providence. For more information about the hospital, see:

<http://www.providence.org/childrenshospital>

# Acknowledgments

*We thank many people for their help with this book.*

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*We also thank those who helped us learn about Alaska before  
statehood.*

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Cherise Cox

Matthew Crowe

Emily Dominick

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Christine Garbe

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*And for permission to use the historic photos you'll see  
throughout this book we thank:*

Alaska State Library

University of Alaska Fairbanks



*Alaska State Library Photograph Collection, Evelyn Butler and George*

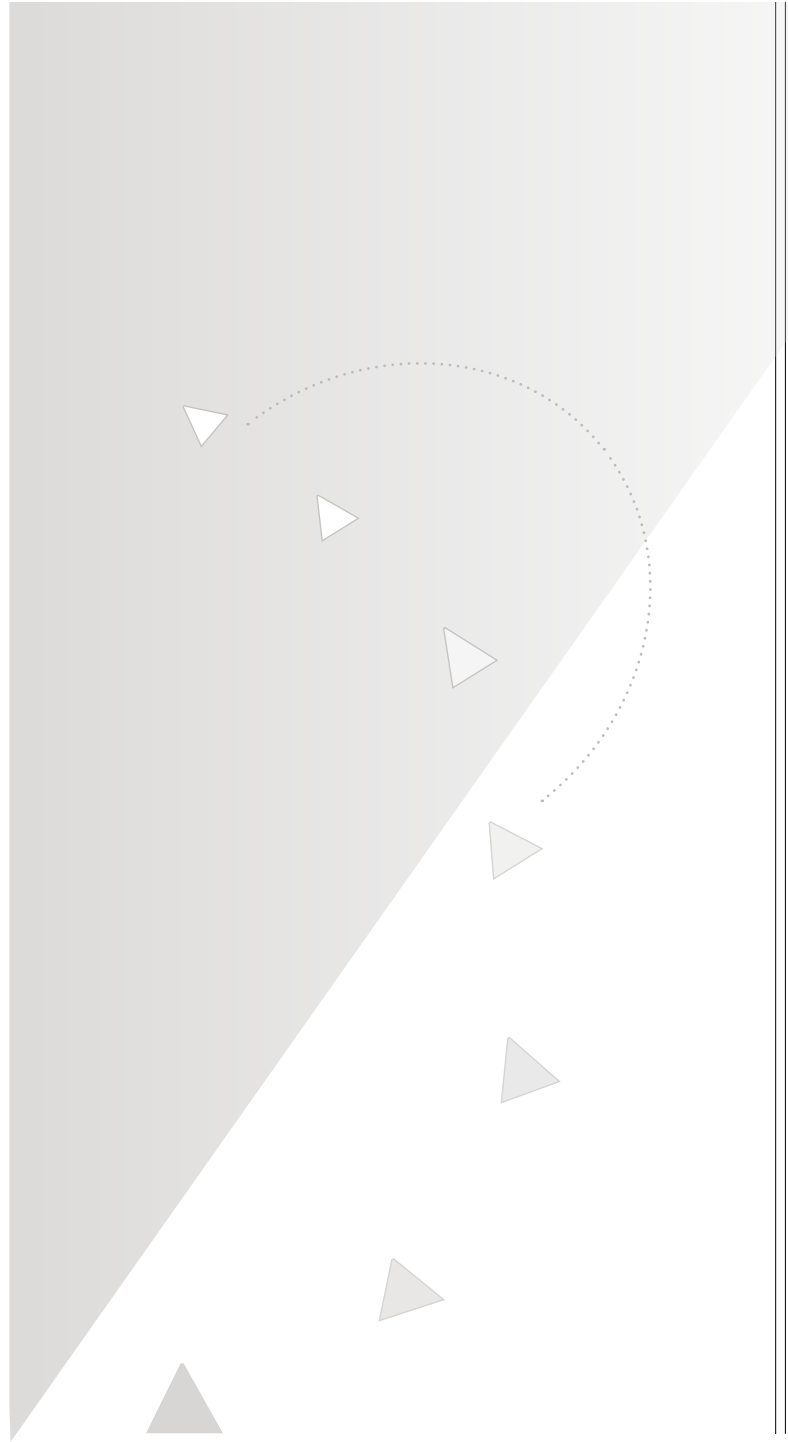
To find this and all previous Kids Count Alaska data books, go to: [www.kidscount.alaska.edu](http://www.kidscount.alaska.edu).

To compare data on kids in Alaska and all other states, go to: [www.datacenter.kidscount.org](http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org).

This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We thank the foundation for its support, but the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation.

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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## INTRODUCTION

We're pleased to announce that Kids Count Alaska is part of a new site, the Kids Count Data Center ([datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)). Developed by the KIDS COUNT national program, the site gives easy access to data on children and teenagers for every state and hundreds of cities and counties across the country.

For Alaska, you can select indicators for each of the state's seven regions and create your own maps, trend lines, and charts. There are also maps and graphs you can put on your Web site or blog. You can go directly to that national site, or you can link from our Web site ([www.kidscount.alaska.edu](http://www.kidscount.alaska.edu)). We hope you'll find the new data and features helpful.

This book and all previous data books are available on our Web site, and each data book is divided into sections for faster downloading. Also on our site is a link to the most recent national KIDS COUNT data book, as well as to other publications and reports.

## ABOUT THIS YEAR'S BOOK

Alaska is celebrating 50 years as a state in 2009—and as part of the celebration, we decided to illustrate this year's data book with historic photos of Alaska's children before statehood. We also used information from the U.S. Census Bureau to take a broad look at how conditions have changed for Alaska's children since statehood. In the Highlights at the end of this section (pages 7 to 10) you'll find some comparisons of the social and economic well-being of children in Alaska in 1959 and today.

## WHAT IS KIDS COUNT ALASKA?

Kids Count Alaska is part of a nationwide program, 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. We hope this book gives Alaskans a broad picture of how the state's children are doing and provides parents, policymakers, and others interested in the welfare of children with information they need to improve life for children and families. Our goals are:

- Distributing information about the status of Alaska's children
- Creating an informed public, motivated to help children
- Comparing the status of children in Alaska with children nationwide, and presenting additional Alaska indicators (including regional breakdowns) when possible

## WHO ARE ALASKA'S CHILDREN?

Almost one of every three Alaskans is under the age of 19. The state's 207,014 children constituted 31% of Alaska's population of 676,987 in 2007—an increase of less than half a percent from 2006. For a longer perspective, the table below compares Alaska's children by age and sex in 1990 and 2007.

The number of children has increased about 15% since 1990—but the overall state population grew faster, at 23%, so children make up a smaller percentage of Alaskans than they did in 1990. Also, the age composition of Alaska children has shifted somewhat. Younger children (under age 10) make up a smaller percentage of all children and older children a bigger share.

The map and the table on the facing page show the share of Alaska children by region and by race.

Anchorage has by far the most children, with 42% of all the children in Alaska. Next is the Interior region, with 15% of all children. The Northern region has the fewest, at 5%.

The majority of children across the state and in most regions are White. The exceptions are in the Northern and Southwest regions, where Alaska Native children predominate.

Children who are Asian, Pacific Islander, or Black still make up relatively small shares of children statewide, but their numbers have grown substantially in recent times, especially in the larger communities. Alaska's school children have become much more diverse in recent decades (as we discuss more in the Highlights at the end of this section).

**Alaska's Children by Age and Sex, 1990 and 2007**

	1990				2007				
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
<b>Total Alaska Population</b>	550,043	289,868	260,176	676,987	346,406	330,581			
<b>Children By Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>		<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>				
<b>Under 1</b>	11,963	6.6%	6,109	5,854	11,110	5.4%	5,598	5,512	
<b>1-4</b>	44,014	24.5%	22,616	21,398	43,823	21.2%	22,822	21,001	
<b>5-9</b>	51,508	28.6%	26,543	24,965	53,334	25.8%	27,569	25,765	
<b>10-14</b>	42,939	23.9%	22,333	20,606	53,231	25.7%	27,047	26,184	
<b>15</b>	7,652	4.3%	4,021	3,631	11,387	5.5%	5,867	5,520	
<b>16</b>	7,341	4.1%	3,786	3,555	11,688	5.6%	6,023	5,665	
<b>17</b>	7,443	4.1%	3,887	3,556	11,728	5.7%	6,025	5,703	
<b>18</b>	7,069	3.9%	3,834	3,235	10,713	5.2%	5,518	5,195	
<b>Total 18 and under</b>	<b>179,929</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>93,129</b>	<b>86,800</b>	<b>207,014</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>106,469</b>	<b>100,545</b>	

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development 2007 Age, Race, and Sex Estimates

**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
- Wrangell-Petersburg Census Area
- Yakutat Borough

**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

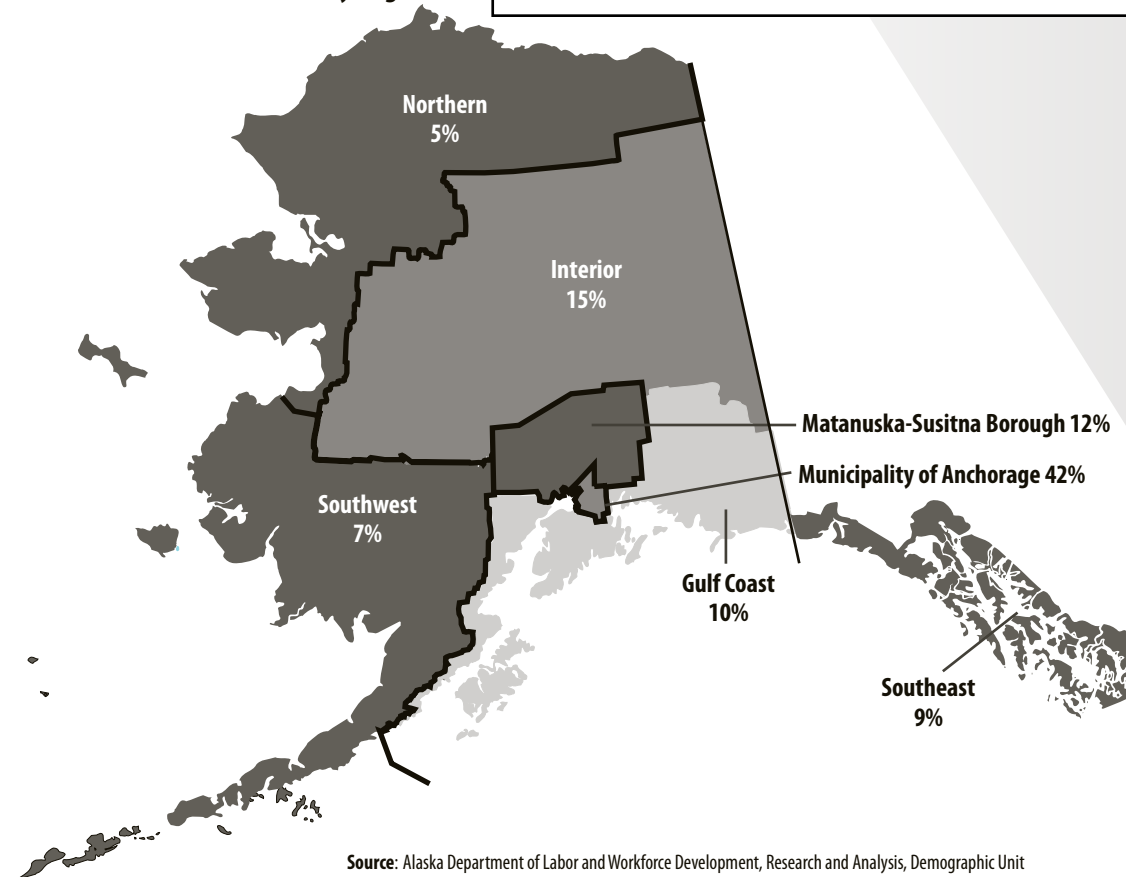
**Racial Composition of Children (19 and Under), by Region, 2006**

Region	White	Alaska Native <sup>a</sup>	Black	Asian/Pacific Isl.
Anchorage	70.6%	12.1%	8.0%	9.3%
Mat-Su	83.8%	11.1%	2.3%	2.8%
Gulf Coast	78.5%	13.9%	1.1%	6.5%
Interior	74.2%	15.7%	7.1%	3.0%
Northern	11.8%	85.1%	0.5%	2.6%
Southeast	68.6%	24.5%	1.0%	5.9%
Southwest	12.0%	85.5%	0.6%	1.8%
Alaska	66.4%	22.5%	5.0%	6.1%

<sup>a</sup>Also includes American Indians, who make up 0.5% of Alaska's population.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis, Demographic Unit

**Percent Distribution of Alaska Children by Region**



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis, Demographic Unit

## ALASKA/U.S. COMPARISONS

The table below compares Alaska and national numbers in 2000 and 2005 or 2006 on the ten key measures of children's well-being. Alaska ranks considerably above the U.S. average on three indicators. It continues to be the state with the smallest percentage of babies born at low weight in the nation, as it has since 2000. Alaska's infant mortality rate of 6 per 1,000 births in 2005 ranked it 13 among the states.

The share of children living in poverty in Alaska is also rated as better than the national average. But, as we discuss in the Economic Well-Being section, many analysts believe this measure underestimates poverty nationwide. A specific shortcoming in Alaska is that it is not adjusted for Alaska's higher living costs, especially in rural areas.

Alaska ranked near the national average on the percentage of children in single-parent households, the share of teenagers who drop out of school, and the share of teenagers not in school and not working.

Alaska's ranking on the teen birth rate worsened considerably in 2006, dropping to 44 among the states. The teen birth rate increased in almost every state between 2005 and 2006, but the increase in Alaska was the largest in the nation. This is a very troubling sign after 15 years of declines in both Alaska and the nation.

Alaska also ranks among the worst in the U.S. in child and teen death rates. Among younger children, accidents cause about half the deaths. Alaska's often unforgiving climate and terrain pose many risks. Among teenagers, nearly a third of the deaths in recent years were suicides. As we discuss later, the suicide rate is especially high among Alaska Native boys.

Also, children and teenagers in remote areas very commonly drive or ride on snowmachines and all-terrain vehicles—and many are injured and some killed in crashes of those off-road vehicles

These and other things combine to make Alaska a dangerous place for children—even the youngest children. For example, results from the Alaska Childhood Understand Behaviors Survey show that 59% of two-year-olds had already ridden in boats.

And on a final indicator Alaska also ranks among the worst. The state has a very high share—almost the highest in the nation—of children with no parent working full-time, year-round. As we discuss more in the Economic Well-Being section, a number of Alaska's private industries are seasonal—and so many Alaskans have only seasonal jobs.



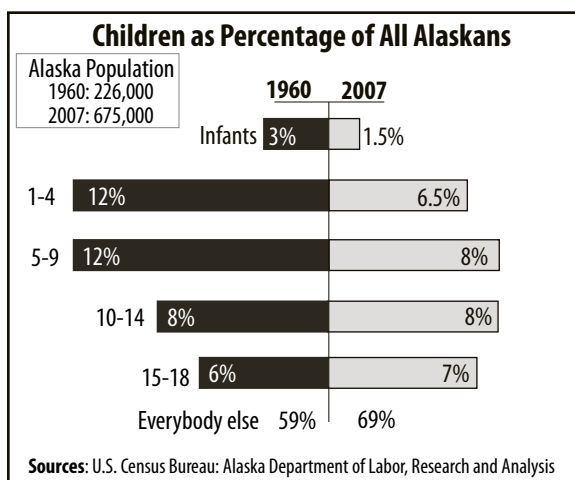
Alaska and U.S. Comparison, 2000 and 2005-2006					
	Alaska		U.S. 2000	U.S. 2005/2006*	Alaska Rank 2005/2006
	2000	2005/2006*			
<b>Alaska Among the Best</b>					
Percentage of babies with low birth weight (2005)	6%	6%	8%	8%	1
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) <sup>a</sup> (2005)	7	6	7	7	13
Percentage of children living in poverty <sup>b</sup> (2005)	13%	15%	17%	18%	16
<b>Alaska Near U.S. Average</b>					
Percentage of children in single-parent households (2006)	30%	30%	31%	32%	22
Percentage of teens (ages 16-19) who drop out of school (2006)	8%	7%	11%	7%	27
Percentage of teens not in school and not working (2006)	8%	8%	9%	8%	27
<b>Alaska Among the Worst</b>					
Child death rate (per 100,000 children 1-14) <sup>a</sup> (2005)	32	24	22	20	34
Teen death rate (per 100,000 teens 15-19) <sup>a</sup> (2005)	142	83	67	65	36
Teen birth rate (per 100,000 girls 15-19) <sup>a</sup> (2006)	49	44	48	42	44
Percentage of children with no parent working full-time (2006)	49%	42%	32%	33%	48
*Some data available for 2006, some only for 2005					
<sup>a</sup> These rates are based on small numbers and can therefore fluctuate sharply from year to year.					
<sup>b</sup> 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>Note:</b> 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.					
<b>Source:</b> Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008 Kids Count Data Book					



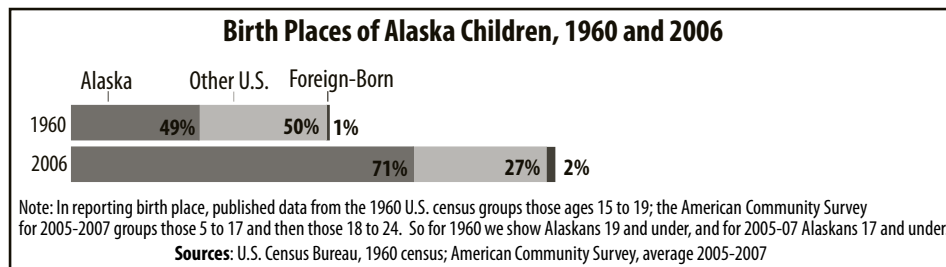
Alaska is celebrating its 50th year as a state—1959 to 2009—so we decided to look at some of the many ways life has changed for the youngest Alaskans over the past half century.

## BEING BORN AND SURVIVING

• **Children make up a smaller percentage of Alaskans.** The overall population grew faster than the number of children since 1959. About 27% of the 226,000 Alaskans in 1960 were under age 10, and 41% were 18 or younger. Now, there are close to 680,000 Alaskans, with about 16% younger than 10 and 31% 18 or younger.



• **Children living here are more likely to have been born here.** In 1960, only about half the children and teenagers living in Alaska had been born in the state. Today that share is around 70%. Alaska's population has become more stable over time. People still move into and out of Alaska with economic booms and busts, and the state also still has a big military population that routinely transfers into and out of Alaska. But overall, more of the people drawn to the state in recent decades are staying on and raising their children here.

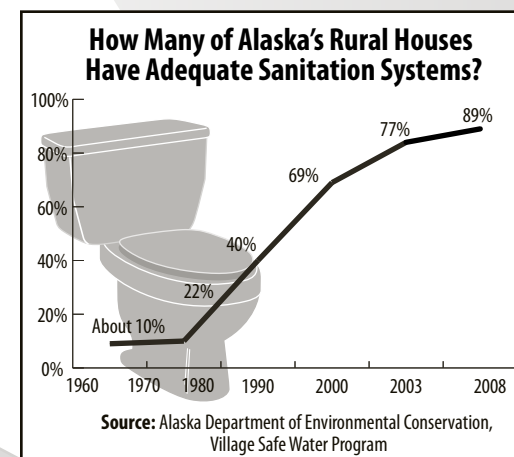
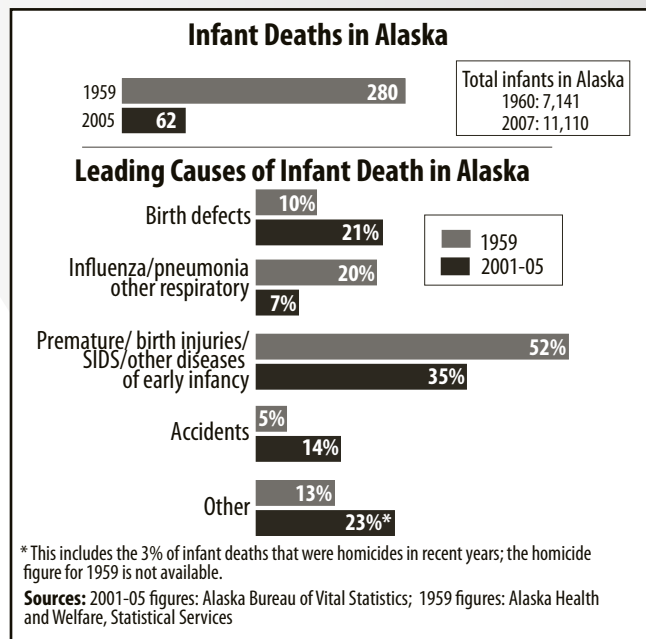


• **Babies are much more likely to survive.** In 1959, 280 of the state's 7,100 infants died before their first birthday. Today, with more than 11,000 infants, about 60 die per year.

Infant mortality throughout the U.S. was much higher in 1960 than it is now, but Alaska's rate was higher than the U.S. average, mainly because the infant mortality rate among Alaska Natives was so high—87 per 1,000. Today, as the Infant Mortality indicator shows (page 17), the rate among Alaska Natives has fallen to 9.4 per 1,000 births—but it's still higher than the overall Alaska rate of about 6 per 1,000 births.

• **Babies are less likely to die from problems related to premature birth** and low birth weight and respiratory illnesses. Medical care for premature and small babies has improved sharply since 1960.

• **Better housing, safe water and sewer systems, and local health clinics in Alaska Native villages** have helped reduce infant mortality and made living conditions healthier for Alaska Native children and adults in remote areas. In 1960, for example, very few of Alaska's hundreds of small villages had sanitation systems. Today the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation reports that nearly 90% of rural houses have adequate sanitation systems.



# Highlights: Alaska's Children Then and Now

## GETTING AN EDUCATION

• **The number of children in Alaska's public schools more than doubled between 1960 and 2008**—up from 50,324 to 128,381.

• **Alaskans in remote communities now have local high schools.** In 1959, as the map shows, most of the relatively few public high schools in Alaska were in the largest places or along the road system. Students from small, remote communities had to attend regional boarding schools, board with families in towns with high schools, or in some cases travel to boarding schools outside Alaska. Church groups also established high school in a few remote places.

But in the 1970s some rural Alaska Native students brought a lawsuit against the state government, charging the state with failing to provide them equal access to education. In a settlement of that suit, the state government agreed to build high schools in small communities throughout Alaska. Today, there are high schools almost everywhere. In the smallest communities, schools are typically combined elementary and high schools.

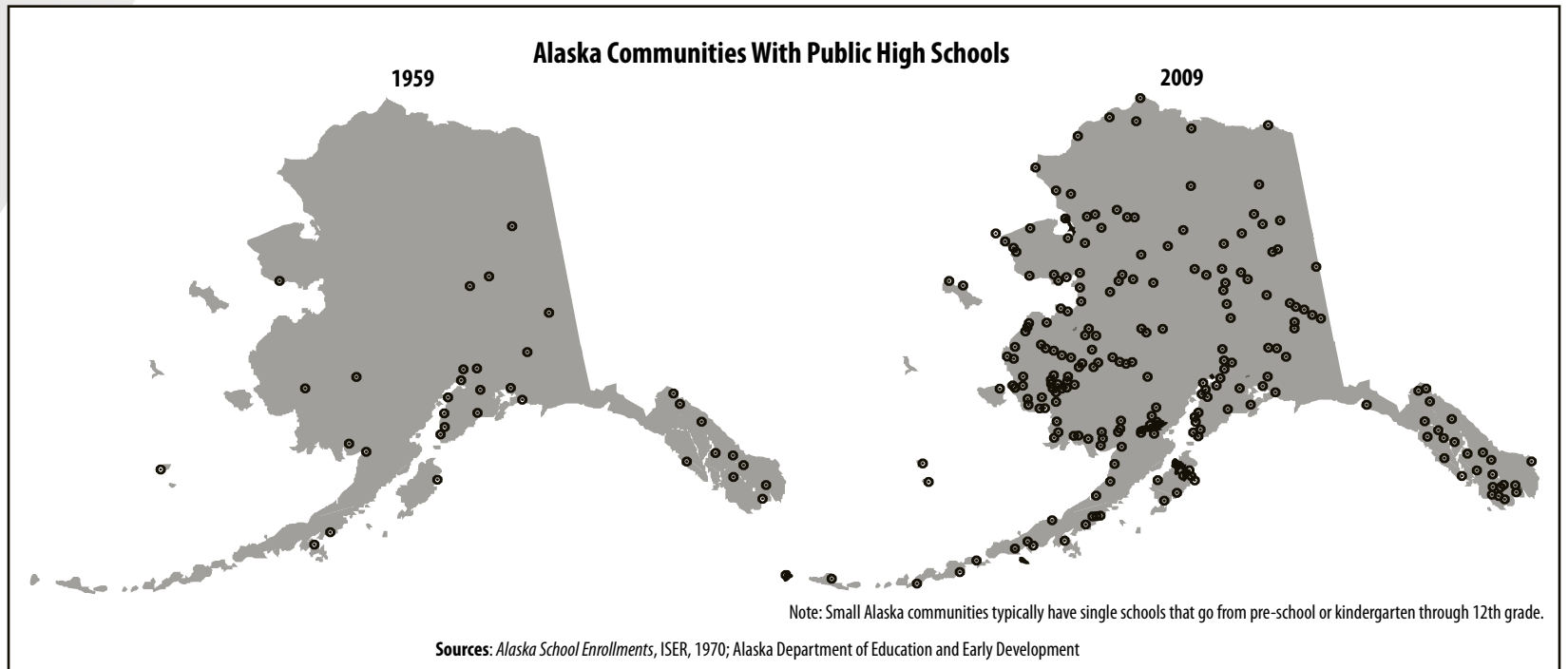
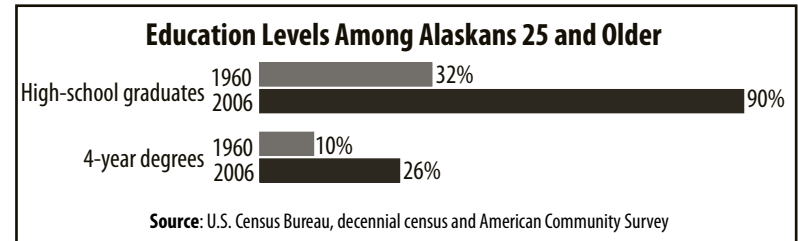
• **Alaskans today are three times more likely to have high-school diplomas.** An estimated 90% of Alaskans over 25 are high-school graduates, compared with just 32% in 1960. Part of that increase is certainly because of the rural high schools built in Alaska since the 1970s. But adults across the country are much more likely to have high-school diplomas now than in 1960.

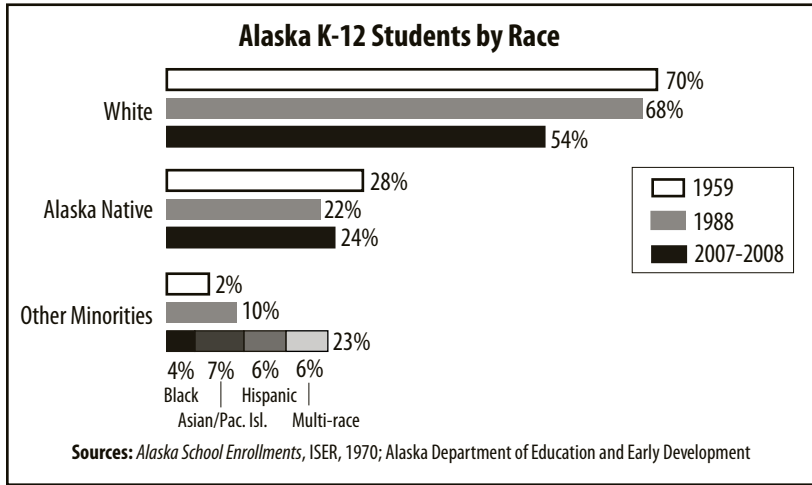
Alaskans are also more than twice as likely to have college degrees now than in 1960. Again, some of that increase reflects the fact that more Alaskans have the high-school diplomas they need to go on to college. Also, the University of Alaska has made higher education much more accessible to rural Alaskans, through rural campuses and distance-education programs.

But Americans in general are more likely to have college degrees now than in 1960—and many of the Alaskans who are college graduates moved here from other states.

What's worrisome, as we discuss in the Teens Who Drop Out indicator, is that in Alaska today only about two-thirds of all high-school students graduate—and graduation rates are even lower among minority students.

• **Alaska's school children have become more diverse.** In 1959, about 70% of all school children were reported as White, 28% as Alaska Native, and just 2% as of other races. By 1988, the share of school children who were neither White nor Alaska Native had increased to 10% and by 2008 it was 23%—4% Black, 7% Asian and Pacific Islander, 6% Hispanic, and 6% multi-race.





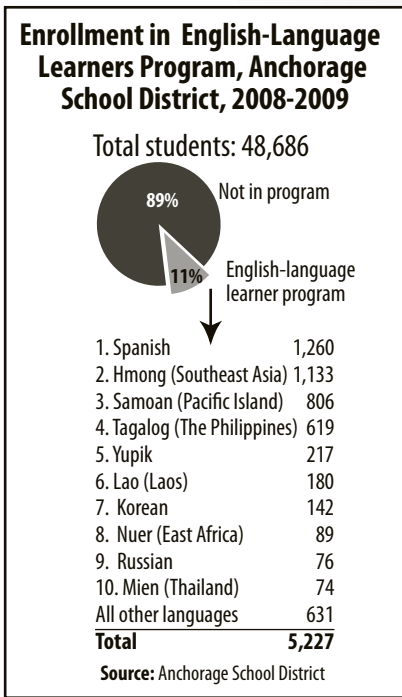
More evidence of the diversity of Alaska's school children today is the array of languages spoken by students in the English-language learner program of the Anchorage School District.

As the adjacent pie graph shows, 11% of students in Anchorage are enrolled in the program, and school officials report that those children speak roughly 90 languages. Many of those languages are spoken by only a few students, but several thousand speak the most common languages—Spanish, Hmong, Samoan, Tagalog, and Yupik, an Alaska Native language of southwest Alaska.

There has undoubtedly been a big increase in numbers of Alaska students of various minorities, but two state agencies that estimate numbers of children by race use somewhat different racial categories—which makes a difference in the statistics.

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development includes children of Hispanic origin and children of more than one race in the "Other Minorities" group (as in the figure above). The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, by contrast, includes children of Hispanic origin and children of more than one race in the other racial groups—that is, they are classified in the White, Black, Alaska Native, or Asian/Pacific Island groups (as in the table on page 5).

Alaska State Library Photograph Collection, Vincent Soboleff Photographs



## LIVING WITH OR WITHOUT PARENTS

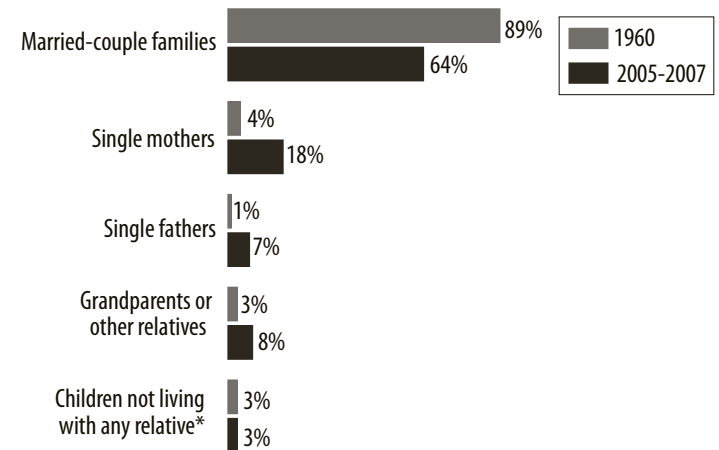
• **Children are far less likely to be living with both parents.** In 1960, close to 90% of Alaska's children and teenagers lived in married-couple families—compared with an estimated 64% today.

• **Five times more children live with single parents**—up from 5% in 1960 to 25% now. The share living with single mothers went from 4% to 18%, but the share living with just their fathers also went up sharply, from 1% in 1960 to an estimated 7% now.

• **Nearly three times as many Alaska children now live with grandparents or other relatives rather than parents.** The percentage of children living with relatives other than their parents went from about 3% in 1960 to 8% today.

• **The share of children living in households with no relatives was about the same in 1960 as it is now—3%.** But in 1960 that figure included teenagers who were boarding with other families so they could attend high school; as we explained earlier, many small Alaska communities had no high schools in 1960. Today, most children living without relatives are foster children.

## Living Arrangements of Alaska Children 18 and Under, 1960 and 2005-07



Notes: Figures exclude children living in group quarters. Figures for 1960 are estimates; some published data from 1960 include 19-year-olds.

\*Children living in households with no relatives in 1960 included some who were students living away from home because their communities didn't have high schools. Today most are foster children.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1960 decennial census; American Community Survey, average 2005-07 estimates

# Highlights: Alaska's Children Then and Now

## FAMILY INCOME AND WORKING MOTHERS

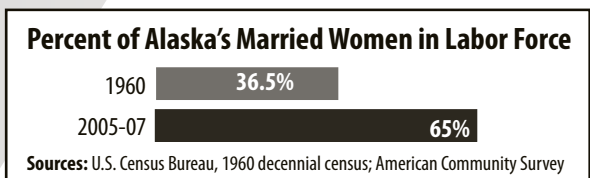
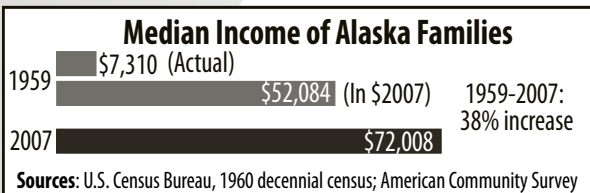
Alaska families have higher incomes now than in 1960, even when we take into account price inflation over time. The median income of Alaska families in 1960 was \$7,310—roughly \$52,000 in today's dollars. The estimated median income of Alaska families in 2007 was about \$72,000—or 38% more than in 1960.

Family income is higher partly because real (adjusted for inflation) wages are higher. Wages in Alaska increased as development of North Slope oil created many high-paying jobs in the 1970s and 1980s. (That wage growth has been much slower since then.)

Also, sources of income other than wages now add more to total income than they did in 1960. Those other sources include, among other things, retirement income and Permanent Fund dividends—cash payments Alaska's state government makes to every resident annually. In 2008, those dividends reached an all-time high of more than \$2,000 for every resident.

But probably the biggest single thing contributing to growth of family income in Alaska is that a much bigger share of women are in the labor force now—meaning more families have two incomes.

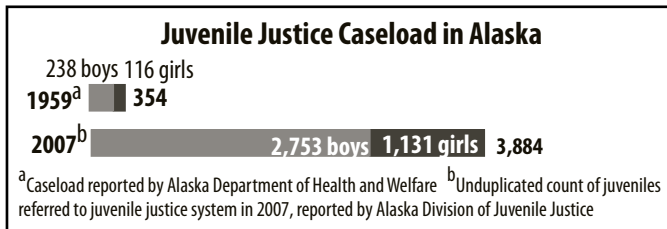
In 1960, only about a third of married women in Alaska were in the work force. Today about two thirds are—about the same percentage as among all women in Alaska. Alaska Native women in particular have moved into the work force—up from about 15% in 1960 to nearly 58% by 2000.



## JUSTICE FOR JUVENILES

In the late 1950s, Alaska had only the beginnings of a juvenile justice system, and no facilities for detaining juveniles—the only U.S. territory or state without such facilities. Juveniles who committed serious crimes were held in boarding homes operated by churches or sent to institutions outside Alaska.

The new Board of Juvenile Institutions reported to the territorial legislature that gaps in the system had created “contempt for the enforcement authorities from the delinquent child.” At the time of statehood, the board had a caseload of about 354—



compared with more than 3,800 referrals reported by the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice in 2007. But given the limits of the juvenile justice system in 1959, it's likely a lot of juveniles who committed crimes just didn't go through the system.

## LIFE AT STATEHOOD

Life is different in dozens of ways for children growing up in Alaska now, compared with 50 years ago. That's of course true across the U.S.—advances in technology have changed almost everything.

But in Alaska the changes have been especially noticeable, because they happened so fast. Alaska's geographic isolation, huge size, and cold climate historically kept costs high and restricted growth in the population and economy. In the 1950s, Alaska's economy relied mostly on military activities, commercial fishing, and a couple of other resource industries. Jobs were scarce and money was tight—for families and for governments.

Alaska children were often by necessity raised on salmon, moose, and caribou. Even today a lot of Alaskans, particularly in remote communities, still rely on wild fish and game to put on their tables—but hunting and fishing aren't as widespread as they were in territorial days.

Running water and indoor toilets were virtually unknown in the state's hundreds

of small, remote villages before statehood. Bigger towns did have sanitation systems and electric utilities—but those generally ended at the city limits.

Many families didn't have telephones until the 1960s. Even in the 1970s, remote communities often had just single phones that everyone used—but they were often out of order. Calling long distance from anywhere in Alaska was expensive and chancy. Television broadcasts from the Lower 48 were available in some places in the early 1960s, but only on a delayed basis.

Alaska's schools offered few organized extra-curricular activities or sports. The main team sport at most high schools was basketball—but only for boys. Some schools had cross-country ski teams that used military-surplus wooden skis. Other team sports generally began developing only later in the 1960s, and even then schools offered very little for girls.

Alaskans relied on mail-order catalogues for things they couldn't buy locally—or could buy locally only at higher prices.

Because of the high costs and difficulties of bringing perishables up from the Lower 48, fresh produce was very limited. Fruits like pineapples seemed exotic to many Alaska kids into the 1960s and even early 1970s.

But life began to change quickly after oil companies discovered a huge oil field on Alaska's North Slope in 1968. By 1977, a pipeline to carry that oil to market had been built.

Most of the economic development since then has depended in some way on oil money. Alaska now has five times the jobs and three times the people it had in 1960.

Today life in Anchorage and other urban areas is in many ways similar to life in other states, and costs are not as high relative to other states as they used to be.

In remote communities, costs are still high, infrastructure is limited, and jobs are scarce. But a combination of state oil money and federal funds has greatly improved schools, health care, housing, and sanitation systems in rural places.

*University of Alaska Fairbanks Photograph Collection, Albert Johnson Photograph*



*Infancy*



**DEFINITION**

Since 2003, we've used the Adequacy of Prenatal Care Utilization (APNCU) index to measure the amount of prenatal care pregnant women in Alaska get. The Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics uses it, and it's also favored by the National Center for Health Statistics, a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It's been described as an "independent assessment of prenatal care utilization after initiation, adjusted for the full range of gestational ages."<sup>1</sup> It uses data from birth certificates to divide care into four levels.

(1) Inadequate care: Prenatal care only in the seventh month of pregnancy or later and mothers making less than 59% of recommended visits.

(2) Intermediate care: Prenatal care starting in the fifth or sixth month and mothers making 59% to 79% of recommended visits.

(3) Adequate care: Prenatal care starting in the third or fourth month and mothers making 80% to 109% of recommended visits.

(4) Adequate plus care: Prenatal care beginning in the first or second month and mothers making 110% or more of recommended visits.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The APNCU index measures how much prenatal care pregnant women get, but not the quality of that care. There is no gauge for the quality of care or services pregnant women receive. Why then, do we report on prenatal care? Even though we can't measure the quality of care, we know that children whose mothers get prenatal care are less likely to experience chronic health problems.<sup>2</sup>

- Healthy pregnant woman generally have healthy babies.
- Healthy babies typically become healthy children.
- Healthy children usually develop into healthy adults.
- Healthy adults are vital to Alaska and the U.S. as a whole.

The need for care before pregnancy—preconception care—has also been getting some attention lately, because women's health before pregnancy influences the well-being of mothers and babies. But data on such care are not yet listed on birth certificates.<sup>3</sup>

**DATA**

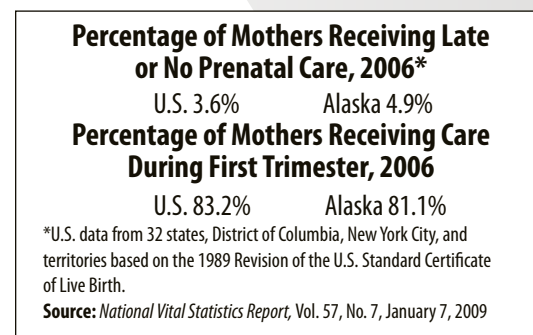
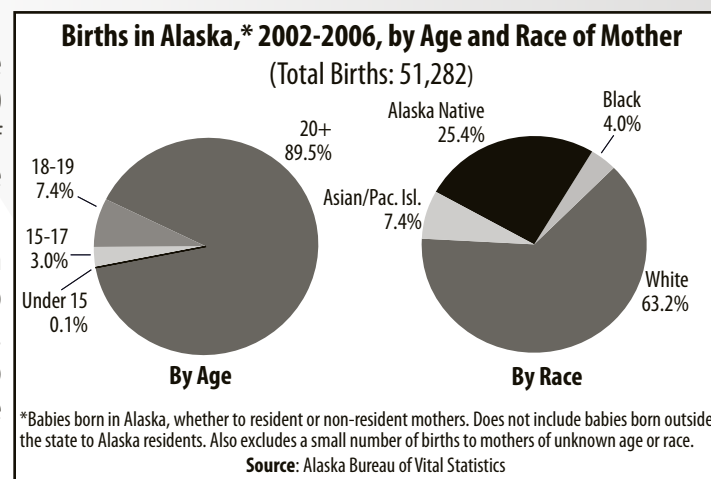
As the adjacent pie chart shows, 51,282 babies were born in Alaska from 2002 to 2006. That number is 1,210 higher than in the previous five years, for an increase of about 2.4%. Births were also up nationwide, with 3% more babies born across the U.S. in 2006 than in 2005.

In Alaska, nearly 90% of babies were born to women at least 20 years old. Just over 7% of babies were born to 18- and 19-year-old mothers, and 3% to mothers 15 to 17. One-tenth of one percent (0.1%) of babies were born to mothers under 15. The age breakdown of mothers in the previous 5-year period (2001-2005) was about the same.

White mothers, who are the largest population group, gave birth to 63.2% of Alaska's babies from 2002 to 2006. The second largest population group, Alaska Native mothers, had 25.4% of the babies. Asian/Pacific Islander mothers had 7.4% of Alaska babies, and Black mothers the remaining 4%. This breakdown by race was very similar to what it had been in the previous five years.

The share of Alaska mothers receiving late or no prenatal care remained about the same in 2006 as in 2005—just under 5%. That compares with an average of 3.6% in 32 states and the District of Columbia. We can't make a nationwide comparison because the data used to calculate percentages are not equivalent in all states. Thirty-two states (including Alaska) use data based on the 1989 revision of the U.S. Standard Certificate of Live Birth, while the other states use figures based on the 2003 revision of that certificate.

A recent National Vital Statistics report noted that the use of prenatal care in the U.S. dropped in 2006. "The trend toward less timely receipt of prenatal care was fairly widespread across reporting areas between 2005 and 2006, although many differences by state were not statistically significant. Prenatal care utilization had risen fairly steadily during the 1990s through 2003; the decline in 2006 follows two consecutive years (2004 and 2005) in which prenatal care levels did not improve."<sup>4</sup>



# Prenatal Care in Alaska

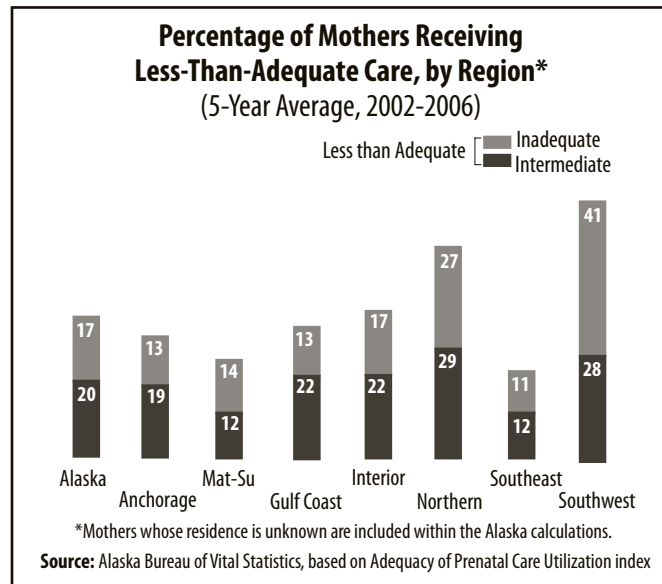
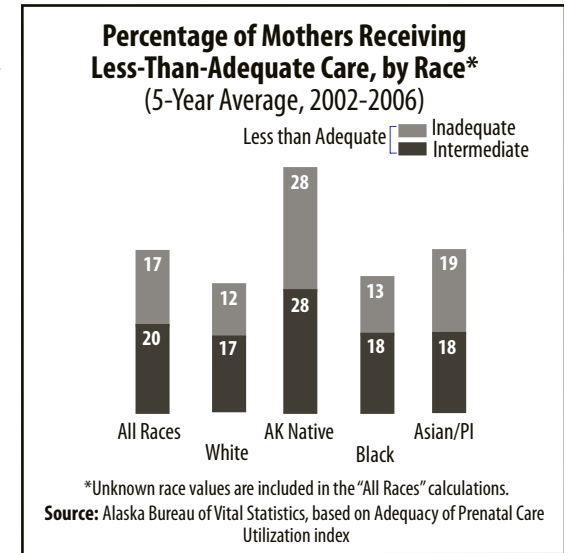
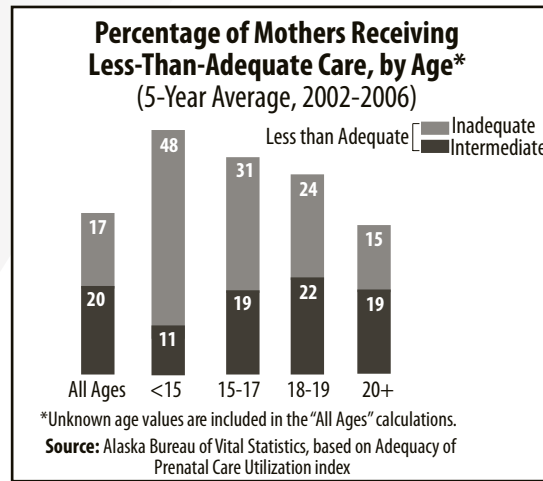
The bar graphs here show the percentages of Alaska women getting less-than-adequate prenatal care by age, region, and race from 2002 to 2006. "Less-than-adequate care" is a combination of the "inadequate" and "intermediate" levels of the APNCU index. The tops of the stacked bars show the percentages of women receiving inadequate care, including women who did not receive any prenatal care at all. The shares receiving intermediate care are shown at the base of the bars.

Keep in mind that the total number of Alaska women of child-bearing age is small to begin with, and numbers broken out by age and race are much smaller. That in turn means small changes in numbers—say in the number of girls 15 to 17 receiving inadequate care—can make a significant difference in the percentages receiving inadequate care.

The overall share of pregnant women getting less-than-adequate prenatal care in Alaska was about 37% from 2002 to 2006—up from 35% in the previous five years. So expectant mothers statewide were somewhat less likely to get prenatal care in the most recent period. Again, as we mentioned earlier, the prenatal care index measures only how much care pregnant women get—not the quality of that care. Still, women who get adequate prenatal care—and their babies—are less likely to have health problems.

Among pregnant women by age, the highest levels of inadequate care were among teenage mothers—58% among those under 15, 50% among those 15 to 17, and 46% among those 18 and 19. Women 20 years and older—who made up nearly 90% of those who had babies—were somewhat more likely to get adequate care, with about 34% getting less-than-adequate care.

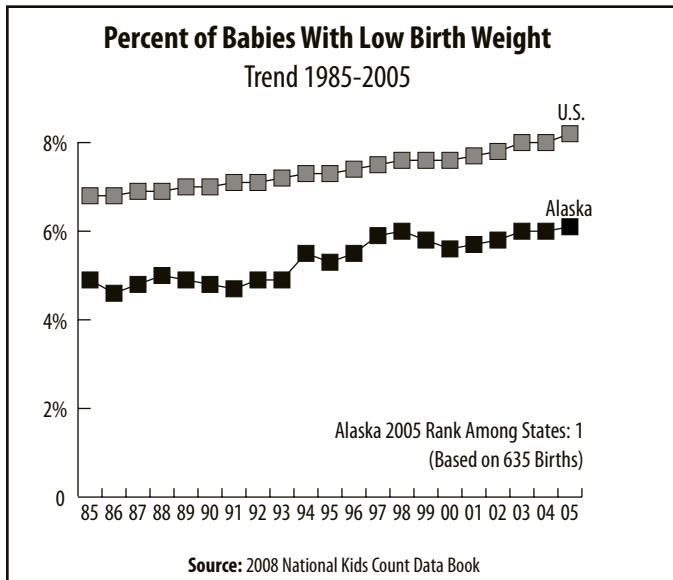
As has been true in the past, the regions with the lowest percentages of women receiving less-than-adequate care were Southeast (23%), Mat-Su (26%) and Anchorage (32%). These three regions have many medical providers and facilities that are easily accessible to pregnant women. In other, more remote regions, access is less readily available.



In the Southwest region, 69% of expectant mothers got less-than-adequate care and in the Northern region 56%. In the Gulf Coast region the share getting less than adequate care was 35% and in the Interior 39%.

By race, Alaska Native women are the most likely to get less-than-adequate care—more than half in the 2002-2006 period. That's partly explained by the fact that many Alaska Native women live in remote areas with more limited medical care than in urban areas. Among women of other races, 29% of White mothers, 31% of Black mothers, and 37% of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers got less-than-adequate prenatal care in the 2002-2006 period.





## DEFINITION

We classify infants who weigh less than 5.5 pounds (2,500 grams) at birth as low birth weight and less than 3.3 pounds (1,500 grams) as very low birth weight. Babies are counted in the region where their mothers usually live. So, for example, if a baby is born in Anchorage, but the mother lives in Bethel, that baby is counted in the Southwest region.

## SIGNIFICANCE

In 2006, the share of babies born at low birth weight nationwide rose to 8.3%, the highest level in 40 years. Since 1990, the percentage of babies born weighing less than 2,500 grams has increased 19%.<sup>1</sup> Approximately one in every twelve babies born in the U.S. now weighs less than 5.5 pounds.

For the period from 2002 to 2006, the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics recorded the share of babies born with low birth weight in Alaska at 5.8%—considerably below the U.S. average, but still higher than in the 1980s.

Healthy People 2010, a national initiative aimed at improving Americans' health, has set a goal of reducing the share of low-birth-weight babies in the U.S. to 5%.

The risks to babies born very small are many: developmental disabilities, birth defects, high rates of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, behavioral problems, and low IQs, among others. Health problems can include heart disease, diabetes, cerebral palsy, breathing and respiratory conditions, vision and hearing loss, and increased risk for various chronic conditions in later life.<sup>2</sup>

Why are babies born with low birth weight? One major reason is premature birth. Babies born before 37 weeks of gestation are classified as premature, and roughly 67% are born at a low birth weight.<sup>3</sup> Other causes of low birth weight are not all understood, but the numbers of babies born small could definitely be reduced.

One step would be helping ensure that women are healthy before they become pregnant. That could be accomplished by better educating women about how to take care of themselves if they plan to have children, screening for potential health problems, and taking care of any existing problems. This idea—called preconception care—is not new, but it is gaining more attention.<sup>4</sup>

Prenatal care, started as early as possible—preferably during the first or second month of pregnancy—is also very valuable. Through regular health-care consultations, pregnant women can manage chronic health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and thyroid disease. They can also be screened for potential infections, learn about health supplements (like folic acid) and good nutrition, and have ready access to doctors, if they have health problems.<sup>5</sup>

Prenatal care providers can also help expectant mothers stop doing things that affect infants' health and weight. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 10% of pregnant women drink and 11% smoke throughout their pregnancies. A recent brief from the Trust for America's Health says, "Heavy alcohol consumption during pregnancy can lead to a combination of physical and mental birth defects called Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, which affects one in 1,000 newborns annually. Alcohol abuse is the leading known preventable cause of mental retardation."<sup>6</sup>

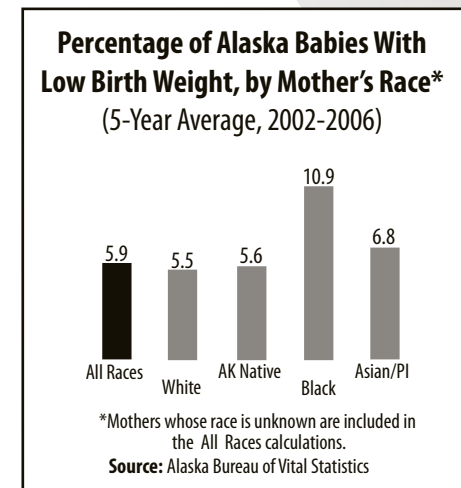
Smoking is also very harmful. The National Center for Health Statistics has reported that cigarette smoking among pregnant women accounts for 20% to 30% of all low-birth-weight babies in the U.S. and is "the greatest known risk factor for low birth weight. Smoking during pregnancy is associated with higher infant mortality, miscarriages, preterm delivery, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and respiratory problems in newborns."<sup>7</sup> Even exposure to secondhand smoke during pregnancy has been shown to increase the chances of women having low-birth-weight babies.<sup>8</sup>

## DATA

Alaska continues to have the lowest percentage of babies born with low birth weight, as it has since 1985. Alaska's rate was 6.1% in 2005, compared with the U.S. average of 8.2%. Both Alaska and the U.S. saw increases of one-tenth of one percent in low-birth-weight babies between 2004 and 2005.

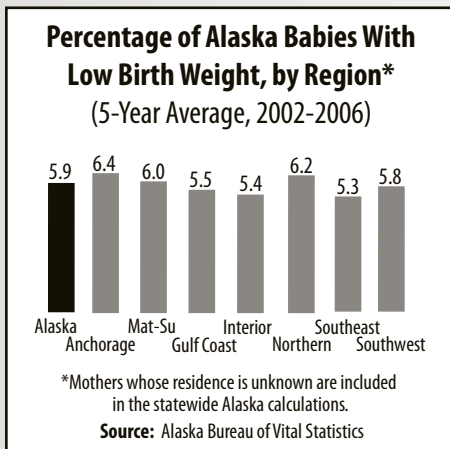
From 2002 to 2006, 5.9% of Alaska babies were born small—a rate that was unchanged from the previous 5-year period.

By race, 5.5% of babies born to White mothers had low birth weight, compared with 5.6% among Alaska Native mothers, 6.8% among Asian/Pacific Islander mothers, and 10.9% among Black mothers. That figure for Black mothers was lower than it had been from 2001 to 2005—when it was 11.2%—but it was still about twice the rate among White and Alaska Native mothers.

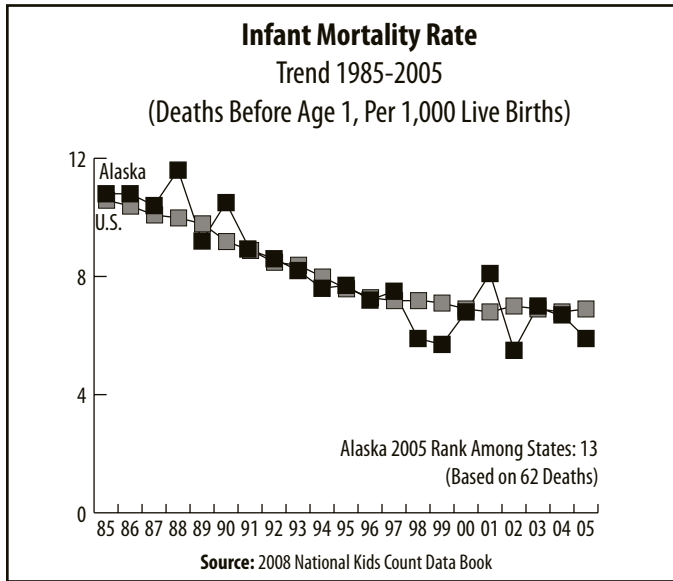


Black mothers in both Alaska and nationwide have higher rates of low-birth-weight babies, but the causes remain unclear. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that, "Much research still is needed to understand the risk factors for premature birth, such as how family history, genetics, lifestyle, and the environment may interact to put some women at greater risk for a premature delivery."<sup>9</sup>

Looking at the shares of low-birth-weight babies by region from 2002-2006, the Southeast and Interior regions had the lowest rate, while Anchorage had the highest, at 6.4%.



University of Alaska Fairbanks Photograph Collection, Mary Whalen Photographs



From 2000 to 2005 the U.S. infant mortality rate did not improve, but preliminary data show a slight decline in 2006.<sup>3</sup>

Still, as of 2000, the infant mortality rate in the U.S. was higher than that in 26 other industrialized countries. And the Trust for America’s Health has reported that in the U.S. over the past 20 years, “lower-income mothers are disproportionately more likely to have babies who die.”<sup>4</sup>

Researchers with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have found that in recent years deaths among babies born before gestation was complete “accounted for more than one third of all deaths during the first year of life, and more infants died from preterm causes than from any other cause.”<sup>5</sup>

The National Center for Health Statistics reports that “Smoking during pregnancy has been repeatedly associated with adverse pregnancy outcomes, including low birth weight, intrauterine growth retardation, miscarriage, and

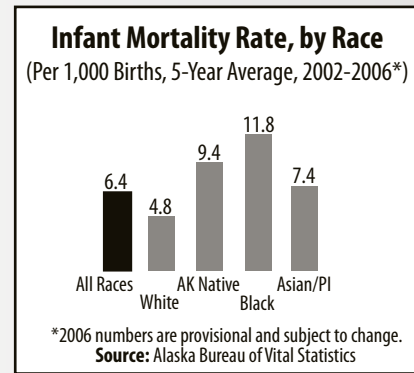
infant mortality, as well as negative consequences for child health and development.”<sup>6</sup> The center has also found that smoking can cause preterm delivery.<sup>7</sup> And the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services reports that “Infants born to women who smoke prenatally have increased risk of neonatal mortality, SIDS, preterm delivery, and low birth weight.”<sup>8</sup>

Many of the causes of infant death are clearly preventable. Better educating expectant parents about risks and ensuring they have access to medical care are the keys.

**DATA**

The U.S. infant mortality rate was 6.9 in 1,000 births in 2005, while Alaska’s rate was 5.9—down from 6.7 in 2004. That improvement propelled the state’s ranking from 25th to 13th among the 50 states. In contrast, the national rate was up slightly (a tenth of one percent) in 2005.

But keep in mind that Alaska’s small population makes figures for Alaska much more volatile than national averages (as the trend graph shows). The number of infants who died in Alaska dropped



from 69 in 2004 to 62 in 2005. That small change in numbers caused a substantial drop in Alaska’s infant mortality rate.

Because small fluctuations from year to year can have a big effect on rates, we calculate data for five-year periods. From 2002 to 2006, Alaska’s infant mortality rate was 6.4 deaths per 1,000 live births—down from a rate of close to 7 from 2001 to 2005.

Among infants of different races from 2002 to 2006, the mortality rate in Alaska was 4.8 per 1,000 for White infants, 7.4 for Asian/Pacific Islander infants, 9.4 for Alaska Native infants, and 11.8 for Black infants.

Rates among White and Alaska Native infants tend to be more stable, because there are many more White and Alaska Native babies than Asian or Black babies born in Alaska. Mortality rates among White infants dropped from 5.4 per 1,000 in 2001-2005 to 4.8 in the most recent period, and the rate among Alaska Native infants was down from 11 to 9.4.

Numbers of Asian and Black babies born in Alaska are much smaller, and their infant mortality rates can rise and fall sharply with relatively small changes in the actual number of deaths. The infant mortality rate for Black infants rose to 11.8 per 1,000 births, compared with 8.6 in the previous 5-year period. The Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics has recently combined Asian and Pacific Island groups when reporting statistics. In earlier years, those groups were reported separately—so we can’t compare the most recent infant mortality rate with earlier figures.

**DEFINITION**

The infant mortality rate is the number of deaths among infants less than one year old, per 1,000 live births. Infant deaths are recorded by where the mother lived, not where the infant died.

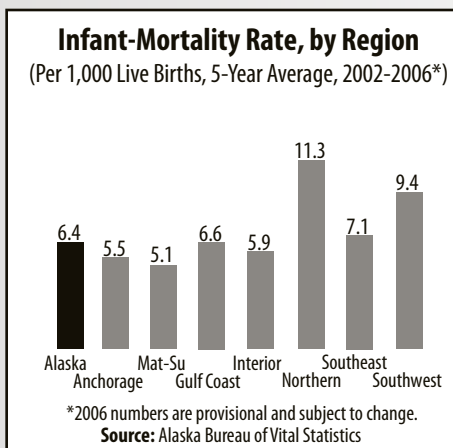
**SIGNIFICANCE**

How do we measure the quality and accessibility of a country’s primary health-care system? Many sources point to infant mortality as one of the most important indicators. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that infant mortality is “associated with a variety of factors such as maternal health, quality and access to medical care, socioeconomic conditions, and public health practices.”<sup>1</sup>

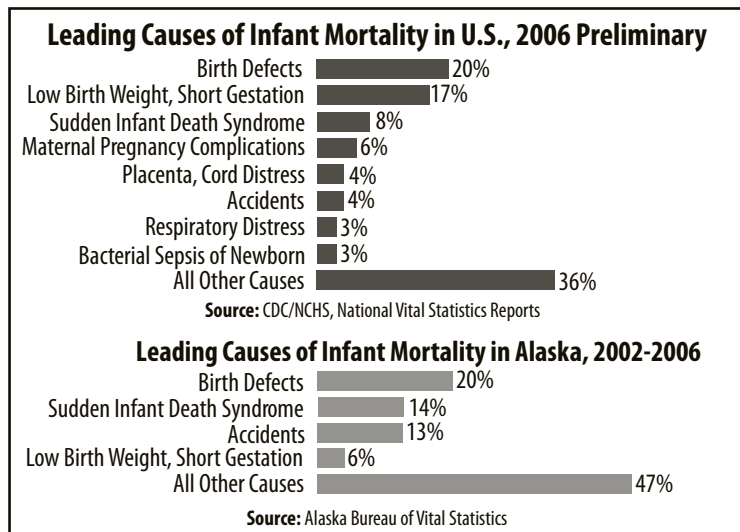
The infant mortality rate in the United States dropped dramatically in the past 50 years. From 1960 to 1980, it declined from about 26 of every 1,000 live births to about 13, with increased family planning and improved care at the time of birth. From 1980 to 2000 the rate improved much more, dropping to about 7 of 1,000 births. The Trust for America’s Health credits “increased access to prenatal care for low-income women, as well as new technologies for premature and tiny babies” for the drop.<sup>2</sup>

# Infant Mortality

The bar graph below shows differences in infant mortality among regions of Alaska from 2002 to 2006. The Mat-Su region, with a rate of 5.1 infant deaths per 1,000 births, was the lowest. Anchorage had a rate of 5.5, the Interior 5.9, the Gulf Coast 6.6, and Southeast 7.1. The highest rates were in the Southwest (9.4) and the Northern region (11.3). Still, those rates did decline from what they were in the period 2001-2005—down from 11.3 in the Southwest and 13.4 in the Northern region.



Sudden Infant Death Syndrome accounts for more deaths in Alaska—14%, compared with 8% nationwide. Accidents also kill more infants in Alaska, accounting for 13% of deaths compared with only 4% in the U.S. as a whole.



## CAUSES OF INFANT DEATH

Infant mortality data for Alaska are reported by the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention compiles and analyzes national data; that information is taken from death certificates and is published in National Vital Statistics Reports. In the figure showing causes of infant deaths, U.S. numbers are preliminary data for 2006 and Alaska numbers are averages for the period 2002 to 2006.

Birth defects continue to be the leading cause of infant mortality, at 20% for both the nation and the state. The next highest causes nationwide are low birth weight and short gestation, which cause 17% of deaths. But in Alaska, which has fewer babies born weighing less than 5.5 pounds, low birth weight accounts for only 6% of deaths.

**ENDNOTES FOR PRENATAL CARE IN ALASKA**

1. M. Kotelchuck, "An Evaluation of the Kessner Adequacy of Prenatal Care Index and a Proposed Adequacy of Prenatal Care Utilization Index," *American Journal of Public Health*, 1994, 84(9):1414-1420.
2. Cassandra Logan, K. Moore, J. Manlove, L. Mincieli, and S. Cottingham, *Conceptualizing a 'Strong Start': Antecedents of Positive Child Outcomes at Birth and Into Early Childhood*, Child Trends Research Brief, Publication #2007-10, February 2007, Washington, D.C.
3. Joyce A. Martin, B. E. Hamilton, P. D. Sutton, S. J. Ventura, F. Menacker, S. Kirmeyer, and T. J. Mathews, "Births: Final Data for 2006," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Volume 57, Number 7, January 7, 2009, National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, MD, 2009.
4. See note 3 above.

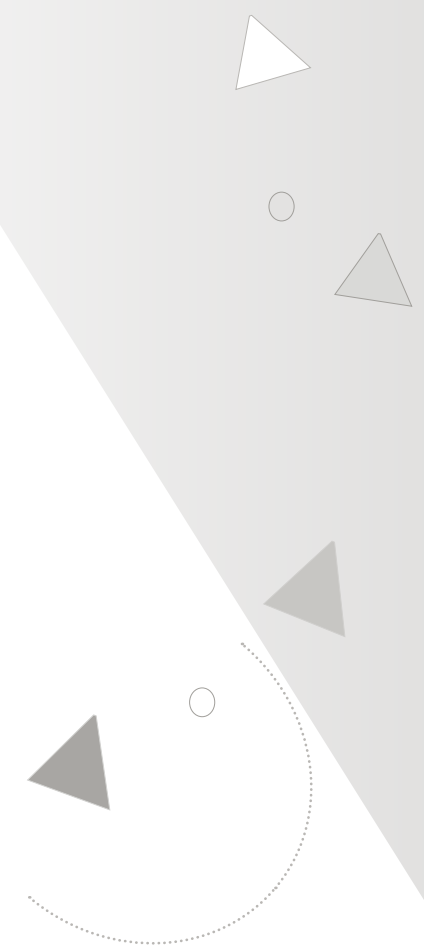
**ENDNOTES FOR BABIES WITH LOW BIRTH WEIGHT**

1. Joyce A. Martin, B. E. Hamilton, P. D. Sutton, S. J. Ventura, F. Menacker, S. Kirmeyer, and T. J. Mathews, "Births: Final Data for 2006," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Volume 57, Number 7, January 7, 2009, National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, MD, 2009.
2. CDC Features, "Premature Births," November 10, 2008, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA. Retrieved February 2009: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/PrematureBirth/>.
3. March of Dimes' Professionals and Researchers Quick Reference: Fact Sheets, "Low Birthweight," May 2008, March of Dimes Foundation, White Plains, NY. Retrieved September 2008: [http://www.marchofdimes.com/printableArticles/14332\\_1153.asp](http://www.marchofdimes.com/printableArticles/14332_1153.asp).
4. "Healthy Women, Healthy Babies: An Issue Brief from Trust for America's Health," June 2008, Trust for America's Health, Washington, D.C.
5. See note 3 above.
6. See note 4 above.
7. "Prenatal Tobacco Use in Alaska," *Title V Needs Assessment: Special Series Fact Sheet*. Women's, Children's and Family Health, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Volume 1, Number 3, March 2005.

8. "Preventing Smoking and Exposure to Secondhand Smoke Before, During, and After Pregnancy," Revised July 2007, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA. Retrieved February 2009: <http://www.cdc.gov/NCCdphp/publications/factsheets/Prevention/smoking.htm>.
9. See note 2 above.

**ENDNOTES FOR INFANT MORTALITY**

1. Marian F. MacDorman, Ph.D., and T.J. Mathews, M.S., "Recent Trends in Infant Mortality in the United States," National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief, Number 9, October 2008, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA. Retrieved January 2009: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db09.htm>.
2. "Healthy Women, Healthy Babies: An Issue Brief from Trust for America's Health," June 2008, Trust for America's Health, Washington, D.C.
3. See note 1 above.
4. See note 2 above.
5. "Maternal and Infant Health Research: Preterm Birth," November 2008, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA. Retrieved February 2009: <http://www.cdc.gov/reproductive-health/MaternalInfantHealth/PBP.htm>.
6. Joyce A. Martin, B. E. Hamilton, P. D. Sutton, S. J. Ventura, F. Menacker, S. Kirmeyer, and M. L. Munson, "Births: Final Data for 2005," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Volume 56, Number 6, December 5, 2007, National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, MD, 2007.
7. T. J. Mathews, M.S. and M. F. MacDorman, Ph.D., "Infant Mortality Statistics from the 2005 Period Linked Birth/Infant Death Data Set," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Volume 57, Number 2, July 30, 2008, National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, MD, 2008.
8. "Infant and Fetal Mortality in Alaska," *Title V Needs Assessment: Special Series Fact Sheet*. Women's, Children's and Family Health, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Volume 1, Number 13, March 2005.



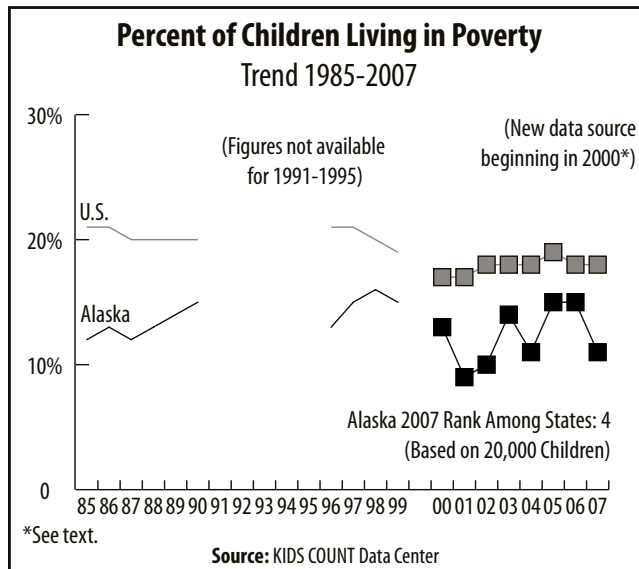




*Economic Well-Being*







## DEFINITION

The trend graph above shows the percentage of children under age 18, in Alaska and the entire U.S., who live in households with incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level. That level varies with family size, number of children, and age of the householders. It is updated annually for inflation, with the Consumer Price Index.<sup>1</sup>

This federal poverty measure was developed in the early 1960s, based on a 1955 survey that reported the share of their income American households spent on food. But the percentages of their income households spend on food and other necessities have changed in the past 50 years, and the need to update the poverty measure has been the topic of a number of studies.

For example, in 1995, the National Academy of Sciences issued *Measuring Poverty: A New Approach*. It detailed the problems and consequences of the current measure and offered what it considered a more accurate alternative.<sup>2</sup> Still, the measure remains unchanged, and here we discuss a number of additional ways of assessing poverty among Alaska's children.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Children who grow up poor face a lot of hardships, but poverty also has consequences for society as well. Children growing up in poverty are estimated to cost the U.S. economy \$500 billion annually and, in Alaska, \$1 billion annually.<sup>3, 4</sup>

The consequences of early poverty also stay with children the rest of their lives. Children who grow up poor are less likely to get the education they need for higher-paying jobs with benefits and less likely to add to the economic productivity of the U.S. They're more likely to be in bad health and more likely to face criminal charges. Unless something changes, the costs of poverty for all Americans will only grow larger with time. The National Governors Association released an issue brief in 2008, citing policy options for state leaders to pursue:<sup>5</sup>

- Expand safety-net opportunities for families in crisis
- Increase the returns on work
- Promote savings and asset accumulation
- Improve the consumer environment in poor neighborhoods
- Increase access to education and training
- Improve access to work supports
- Invest in young children
- Strengthen family relationships

The governors' brief acknowledges that states face budget constraints even as more families struggle in the current recession, and it recommends low-cost as well as phased-in options. The brief concludes, "By pursuing strategies that help reduce poverty, states not only can improve the lives and outcomes of children, but also can significantly strengthen state and local economies."<sup>6</sup>

## DATA

We know economic circumstances have changed since the data presented here were collected, but we can't get more recent numbers yet. The final numbers for most indicators aren't available until a year or sometimes two years after they are collected.

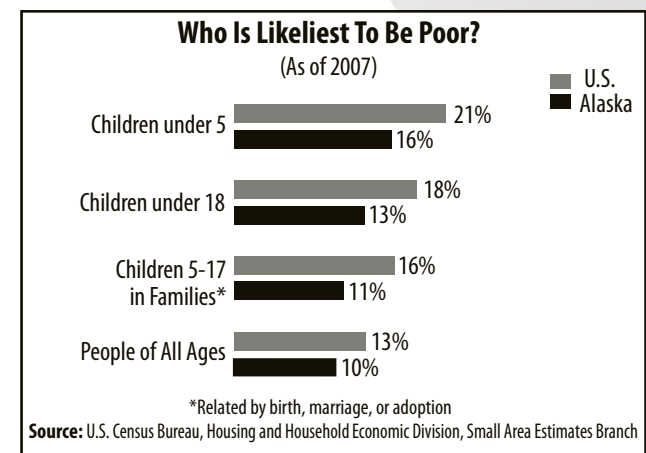
The poverty trend graph is a good example of the time lag. It is based on data from the American Community Survey, with 2007 data the most recent. It shows that the percentage of Alaska children living in poverty declined to 11% between 2006 and 2007—to the same level as it was in 2004. For the U.S. as a whole, the percentage remained the same in 2007 as it was in 2006, at 18%. Yet, as we write this in early 2009, we know that the U.S. is in a serious recession, that unemployment rates are

increasing, and that many more children are currently living in poverty. Unfortunately, the available data reflect what was occurring two years ago, before the recession started.

The bar chart below, showing poverty by age, is also based on 2007 data. But even though the percentages have likely changed, the overall picture of poverty it presents is still valid: children are more likely than adults to be poor, and the youngest children—under age 5—are the most likely to be poor. That's true in both Alaska and nationwide.<sup>7</sup>

The percentage of Alaska children who can qualify for free or reduced-price meals at school is another way of measuring how many are from low-income families. In the 2007-2008 school year, Alaska children from families of four with household incomes below 130% of the poverty level (\$33,566) could receive free meals. Those with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty level (\$47,767) qualified for reduced-price meals.

As the pie chart on the next page shows, about 32% of Alaska school children received free meals and 8% received reduced-price meals in 2007-2008. The percentage varied a lot among school districts, with more than 87% of students receiving free or reduced-price meals in the Bering Strait, Southeast Island, St. Mary's, and Yupiit school districts and less than 25% in the Skagway, Unalaska, and Juneau districts.



# Children Living in Poverty

School meals can include breakfast and lunch, and nationwide nearly 86% of schools that offer lunch now also offer breakfast. But in Alaska, 69% of schools that provide lunches don't provide breakfasts.<sup>8</sup> A fact sheet from the Food Bank of Alaska reports that the actual cost for lunch for Alaska schools on the road system is \$4.65 and for rural schools \$6.20.<sup>9</sup>

But the current federal reimbursement rate for children receiving free breakfasts is \$2.68 and for lunches \$4.20.<sup>10</sup> So in Alaska, the reimbursement doesn't cover the full cost of the meal. This would help explain why some schools don't participate in all the meal programs. Legislative mandates requiring participation in the breakfast program exist in 27 states, but Alaska isn't one of them.<sup>11</sup> In the 2006-2007 school year—the most recent funding data we could locate—Alaska received \$5.1 million for participating in the breakfast program and \$23.5 million for the lunch program.

Alaska loses when the breakfast program isn't available for children who need it. If Alaska were to increase the number of children participating in the breakfast program to 60 for every 100 in the lunch program, 8,650 additional children would get breakfast—and federal funds would cover almost \$2 million of the cost.

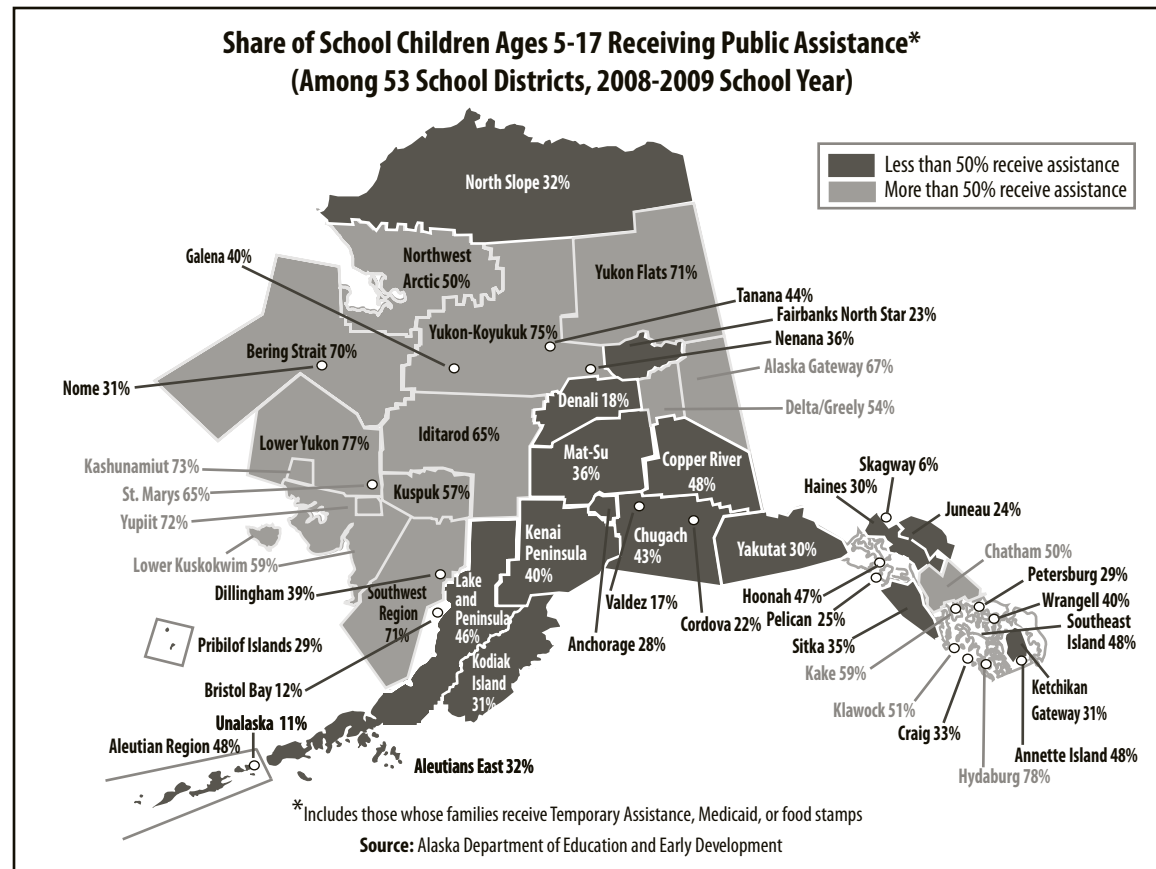
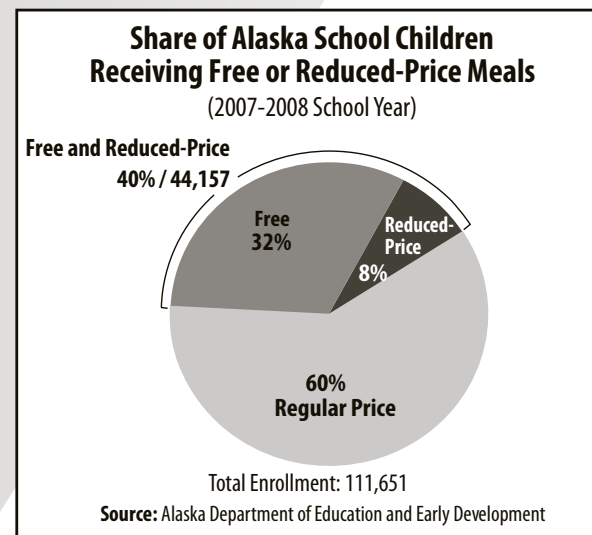
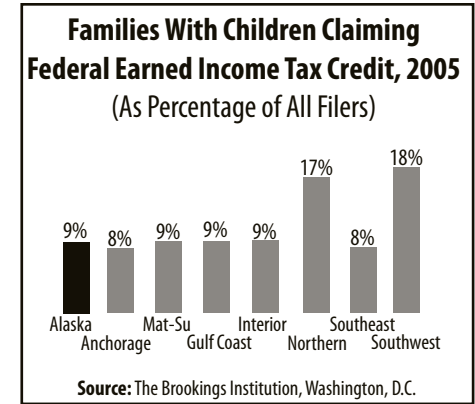
Yet another measure of poverty is the share of school children who come from families receiving some form of public assistance, shown on the map for Alaska's 53 school districts. These are children ages 5 to 17 from families receiving Alaska Temporary Assistance,

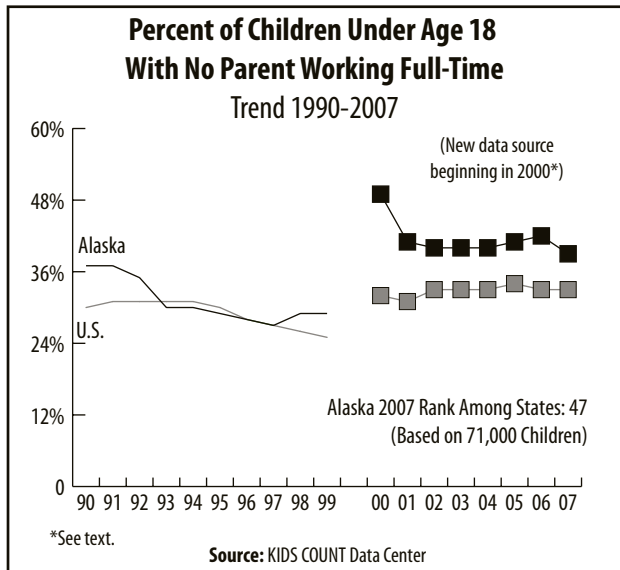
Medicaid, or food stamps. In most districts in interior and western Alaska, more than 50% of school children are from families receiving public assistance and in some the share exceeds 70%.

A final way of understanding how many children live in low-income families is the percentage of families claiming the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which began in 1975 as a way to ensure a minimum income for American workers. It has continued and expanded to support low-income working families. The credit is first applied to the amount of taxes owed. If the credit exceeds the amount owed, the filer may claim the remainder as a refund.<sup>12</sup>

In 2005—the most recent year for which data exist—9% of all tax filers in Alaska are working families with children who received the EITC. The bar chart shows the percentage of families

with children claiming the EITC, as a percentage of all filers by region. The highest shares are in the Northern (17%) and Southwest (18%) regions and the lowest in Anchorage and Southeast (8%). The 2005 percentages statewide and by region were very similar to those in 2004.





## DEFINITION

The trend graph shows the percentage of children in Alaska and the entire U.S. living in households where no parent has full-time, year-round employment. It includes children who live with both, one, or neither parent. Since 2000, the data in this graph have come from the American Community Survey and are not comparable to data from earlier years. Households where at least one parent has full-time, year-round employment are defined as those where one parent worked at least 35 hours a week for 50 weeks in the 12 months before the survey. This is an arbitrary dividing line, but it's useful as a standard to measure the likelihood that children live in financially stable households.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Even families where one parent has secure employment don't necessarily have incomes adequate to cover all their needs, and they may not be able to save for the future. But children whose parents aren't securely employed face even more hardships—very often, lack of health insurance. For parents who can't get insurance through their employers, insurance is much more expensive and hard to get. Nationally, 14% of children living in families without secure parental employment lack health insurance, compared with 9% of children in families with secure employment.<sup>1</sup>

Also, seasonal, part-time, or temporary employees are not likely to have paid sick leave. These parents may have to make very difficult decisions—for instance, choosing between staying home with a sick child or losing wages and possibly their job.

## DATA

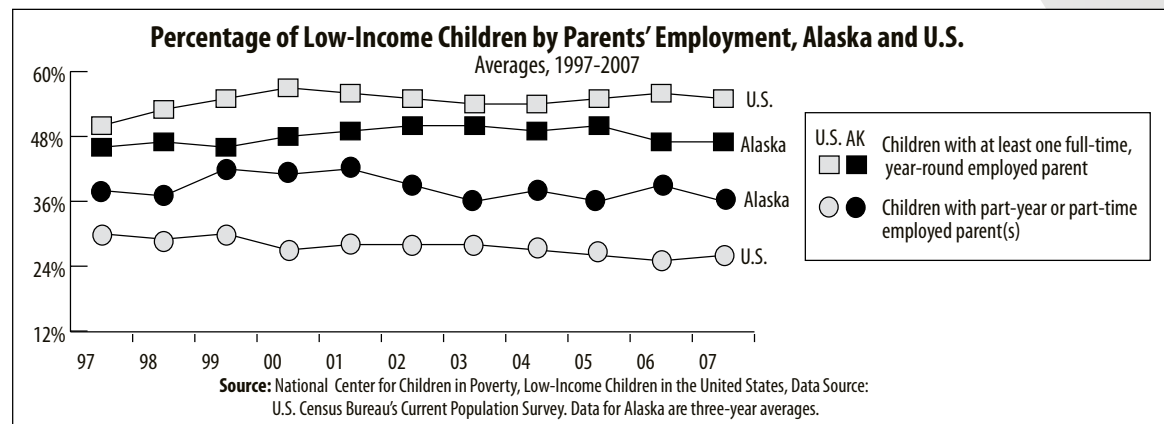
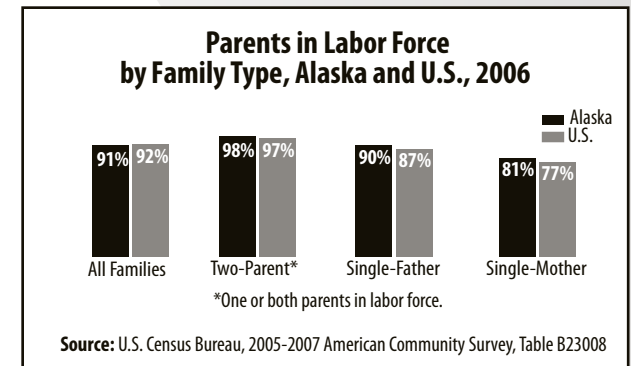
The trend graph shows that as of 2007, 39% of children in Alaska did not have a parent with full-time, year-round employment. That was significantly higher than the national average of 33%. Alaska was ranked almost at the bottom of the states. Only Mississippi and Louisiana had slightly higher percentages of children living in families where no parent had secure employment.

In one sense it isn't surprising that Alaska ranks so poorly on this indicator, because Alaska has the highest seasonal change in private employment in the country. Several of the state's big industries (tourism, construction, timber, mining, and fishing) are largely seasonal. Given the structure of the state's economy, Alaskans can't count on employer-based insurance as much as other Americans.

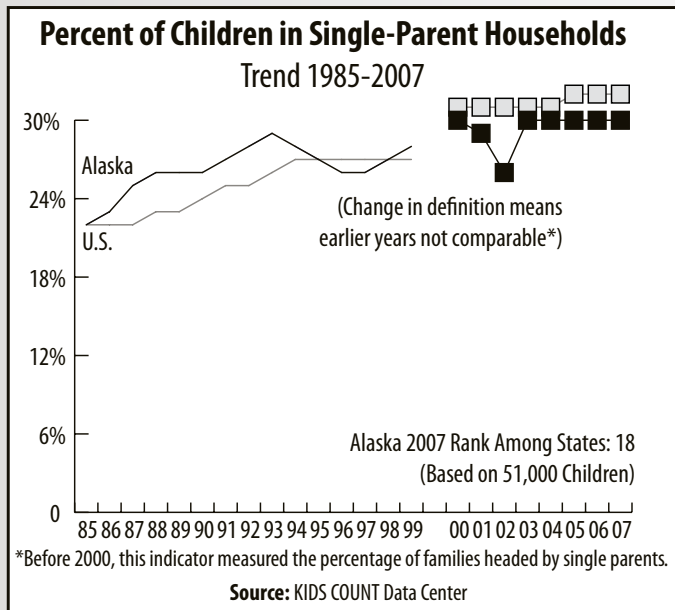
The line graph below shows what percentages of children from low-income families had parents who worked full- or part-time, in Alaska and nationwide, from 1997 to 2007. The data are collected by the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, and the estimates for Alaska are three-year averages. "Low-income" here is defined as a family income less than twice the federal poverty threshold—which in 2007 for a family of four was \$41,300.<sup>2</sup>

The difference in Alaska's employment structure is apparent in the line graph at the bottom of the page, showing that throughout the decade close to 40% of children from low-income families in Alaska had parents working only part of the year or part-time—about 10 percentage points above the national average.

The bar chart below offers a different look at how children's security could be affected by their family type. Almost all two-parent families have at least one parent in the labor force (with jobs or looking for work), in Alaska and the entire U.S. Most single fathers are also in the work force, but the share in Alaska is somewhat higher. Single mothers are less likely to be in the work force than single fathers—but the share of single working mothers is higher in Alaska than nationwide. Percentages of both single fathers and mothers in Alaska's labor force increased by around 3% in recent years. (Figures for Alaska are averages for 2005, 2006, and 2007.)



# Children In Single-Parent Households



## DEFINITION

Children living in single-parent families is the percentage of children under 18 living with their own single parent, either in a family or subfamily. These families may include unmarried couples living together. Children who live in institutions, dormitories, or other group quarters are not included.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Paul Amato, a researcher who studies how family structure affects children, believes children living in single-parent families are more likely to have cognitive, social, and emotional problems that will continue when they're adults.<sup>1</sup> He does emphasize that the quality of parenting, regardless of the family structure, is one of the best predictors of how well children do—but it's difficult for single parents to function as effectively as two parents.

Nearly a third of American children live with just one parent, and that's not likely to change any time soon. Amato believes that promoting marriage and strengthening marital stability can help, but that the U.S. also needs policies to "improve economic well-being, strengthen parent-child bonds, and ease the stress experienced by children in single-parent and step-parent households."<sup>2</sup>

A 2000 article from the Urban Institute also described a new type of American family structure—what it called the fragile family. These are low-income families where children are raised by both parents who never marry but either live together or the father visits frequently.<sup>3</sup> These fragile families are much more common among couples with young children.

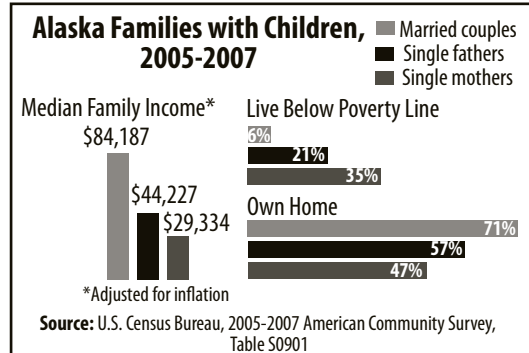
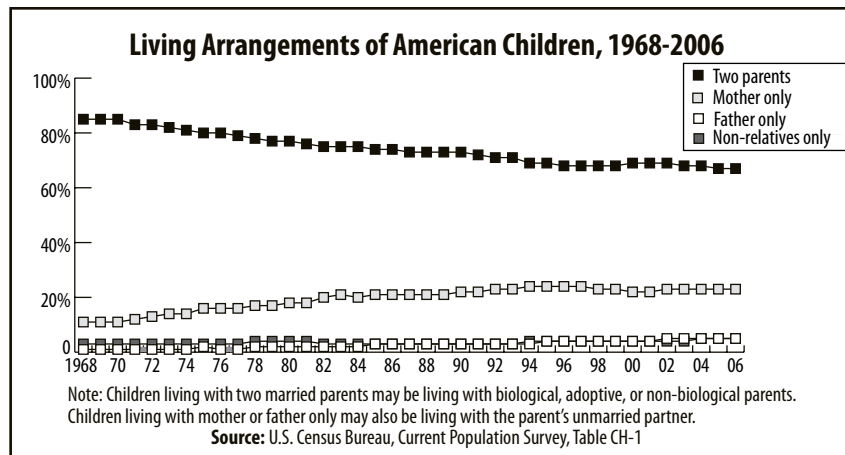
## DATA

The trend graph to the left shows that the percentage of children living in single-parent families has remained fairly constant over the past eight years—at 30% in Alaska and 31% or 32% nationwide.

The line graph below provides a longer picture of trends in the living arrangements of American children. From the late 1960s through the mid-1990s, the share of American children living in families with both parents was dropping and the share living with single parents (mostly mothers) was rising. But in recent years, those trends have leveled off.

Still, of the estimated 182,325 Alaska children living in households in the 2005-2007 period, close to a third lived with single parents—69% lived in married-couple households, 8% lived with their fathers, and 21% lived with their mothers. (These figures exclude children living in group quarters.)

Keep in mind, however, that in some cases a single mother or father is not the only adult in the household. Among Alaska families headed by single men in the 2005-2007 period, 40% lived with



partners they were not married to. Among families headed by single women, 20% lived with partners they were not married to.

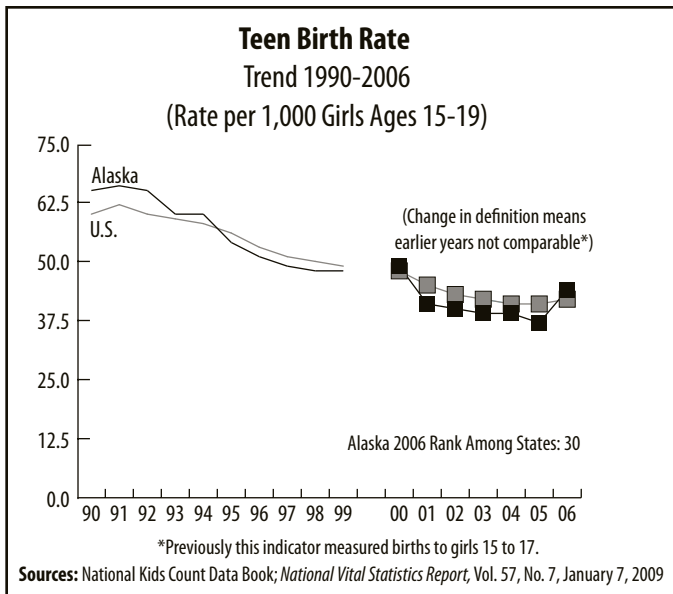
But whether they live with other adults or just their children, Alaska's single parents have much lower incomes, are more likely to live below the poverty line, and are less likely to own homes.

The bar chart above shows that married couples with children in Alaska had median incomes of about \$84,000 in 2005-2007. That was almost twice the income of single fathers (\$44,000) and nearly three times that of single mothers (\$29,000).

With much lower incomes, Alaska's single-parent families are much more likely to live below the poverty line—21% of single fathers and 35% of single mothers.

Another consequence of lower incomes is that single parents are less likely to be able to afford their own homes. About 71% of married couples with children owned their own homes in 2005-2007, compared with 57% among single fathers and just 47% among single mothers.

Another consequence of lower incomes is that single parents are less likely to be able to afford their own homes. About 71% of married couples with children owned their own homes in 2005-2007, compared with 57% among single fathers and just 47% among single mothers.



**DEFINITION**

The teen birth rate is the number of births per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19. Until 2000, this indicator measured only births to girls ages 15 to 17—so numbers before and after 2000 are not comparable. Births are counted in the mother’s place of residence, which is sometimes different from where the births occur.

For this indicator we present information from a number of sources, which may cover different times and use different definitions—so the figures are not entirely comparable.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

Teenage mothers are less likely to receive adequate prenatal and postnatal care and are more likely to experience complications in labor and delivery. They are less likely to gain the recommended amount of weight during pregnancy and more likely to have pre-term births, pregnancy-induced hypertension, anemia, and sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>1</sup>

Infants of teenage mothers are also born with low birth weight at a rate twice that among older mothers, and the neonatal-mortality rate among babies of teenagers is three times higher.<sup>2</sup> Because the children of teenage mothers are more likely

to be born prematurely and at low birth weight, they face an increased probability of infant death, blindness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, and cerebral palsy, as well as double the chance they will later be diagnosed with dyslexia, hyperactivity, or some other disability.<sup>3</sup>

Pregnant teenagers are also more likely to suffer physical abuse than other girls. One study found that 33% of pregnant teenagers reported more than one incident of violence during their pregnancy. Over 50% of the reported physical abuse was to their abdomens. Among those reporting abuse, the majority said their partners had abused them, but they were also abused by their mothers (9.6%), fathers (6.5%), and brothers (6.5%).<sup>4</sup>

Another study found that among girls 11 to 15 who were either pregnant or had babies, 62% reported domestic violence at the hands of their partners, as did 56% of girls ages 16-19 who were pregnant or had babies.<sup>5</sup> Women younger than 20 had the highest rate of homicide associated with pregnancy; that rate decreased as the women’s age increased.<sup>6</sup> In Alaska, 26% of mothers 17 and younger and 23% of mothers 18 and 19 report experiencing violence before, during, and after their pregnancies.<sup>7</sup>

**DATA**

As the trend graph shows, the birth rate among teenage girls in Alaska and nationwide increased in 2006. In Alaska the rate was up from 37 per 1,000 girls in 2005 to 44 per 1,000 in 2006, and nationwide the rate was up from 40 per 1,000 to 42.

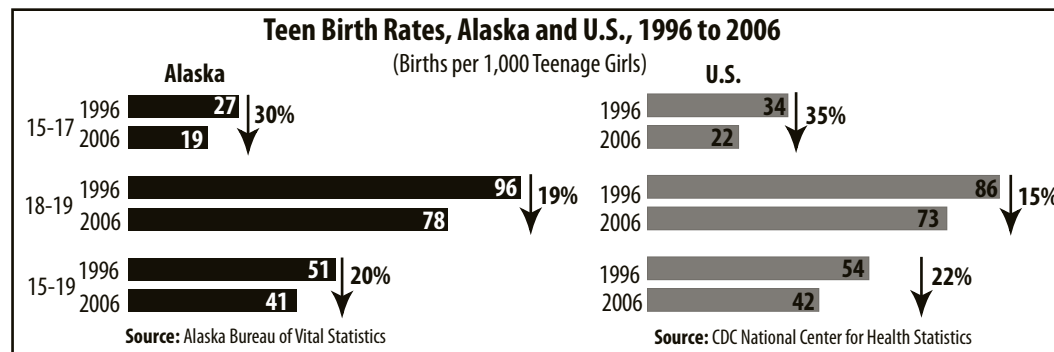
That was a 19% increase in Alaska’s teenage birth rate and a 5% increase in the U.S. average. Twenty-six states saw significant increases, with Alaska’s increase the largest.

But it is only among older girls in Alaska where the birth rate is higher than the national average—78 per 1,000 girls 18 to 19 in Alaska and 73 nationwide. Among younger girls, Alaska’s 2006 rates was 19 per 1,000 girls 15 to 17, while the U.S. rate was 22 per 1,000.<sup>8</sup> This has been a consistent pattern for the past decade, with a lower birth rate among Alaska teenagers 15 to 17 and a higher rate among those 18 and 19.

Whether the 2006 increase was the beginning of a trend or merely an aberration isn’t yet known. But it was the first time these rates had increased either in Alaska or nationwide since 1991.

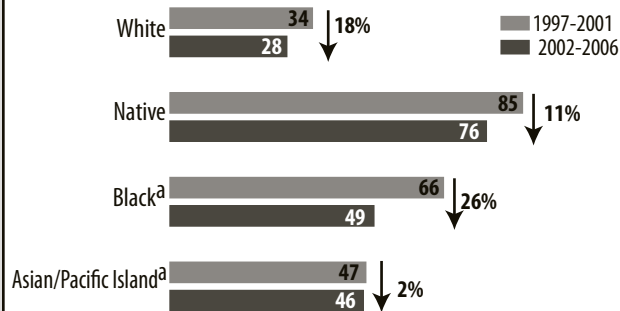
The bar graph below shows that despite the 2006 increase, the birth rates among younger and older teenagers in both Alaska and the country as a whole remain substantially lower than they were in 1996. But the decline has slowed considerably in recent years.

The five-year average teen birth rate for the period 2002 to 2006, shown on the next page, was also lower among Alaska girls of all races than it had been in the period 1997-2001. But keep in mind that there are relatively few Black and Asian/Pacific Island teenagers in Alaska, so birth rates for these two groups can fluctuate dramatically from year to year.



## Birth Rates For Alaska Teens, by Race, 1997-2001 and 2002-2006

(Rate per 1,000 Girls 15-19, 5-Year Averages)



<sup>a</sup>Numbers of babies born to Black and Asian or Pacific Island teenage mothers are relatively small, so rates can fluctuate significantly.

Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

The birth rate among Alaska's Black teenagers fell the most in the 2002-2006 period, down 26%, while the rate among Asian and Pacific Island girls was down about 2%. In 2006, the birth rate among White teenagers remained the lowest, at 28 per 1,000 girls 15 to 19, while the rate among Alaska Native girls remained the highest, at 76 per 1,000 girls.

Alaska's teen birth rate varies significantly in different regions of the state, as the bar graph to the right shows. From 2002 to 2006, the Gulf Coast and Southeast regions had the lowest rate (29 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19), followed by the Mat-Su region at 31. With a rate of 39 births per 1,000, Anchorage still had a rate below the state average of 41.

Northern and Southwest Alaska both had rates a great deal higher than in the rest of the state. Southwest Alaska's teen birth rate was 72 births per 1,000 girls, and Northern Alaska's rate was 88 per 1,000—almost triple the rate of the Gulf Coast or Southeast.

Birth rates in the Northern and Southwestern regions may be affected by the fact that they are more isolated, health services information in the smaller communities is limited, and contraceptives or specific types of contraceptives either aren't available or are expensive in many villages.

The teen birth rate in every region of Alaska was lower in 2002-2006 than in 1994-1998. The state average dropped by 12 percentage points, from 53 to 41. The decline in the Gulf Coast was the greatest—a 17 percentage point drop—while Southwest Alaska saw the smallest decline, at 6 percentage points. Even with the 2006 increase in birth rates, rates in most regions stayed close to what they had been in 2001-2005.

Most mothers under the age of 20 are unmarried. In 2005, 80% of births to Alaska mothers under the age of 20 were to unmarried mothers, and in 2006 that number increased to 81%. The U.S. average in 2006 was 84%. And 19% of the births to Alaska teenagers in 2005 were to girls who were already mothers. In 2006, that figure rose to 21%—close to the same as the national figure of 19%.<sup>9</sup>

### WHY THE 2006 INCREASE?

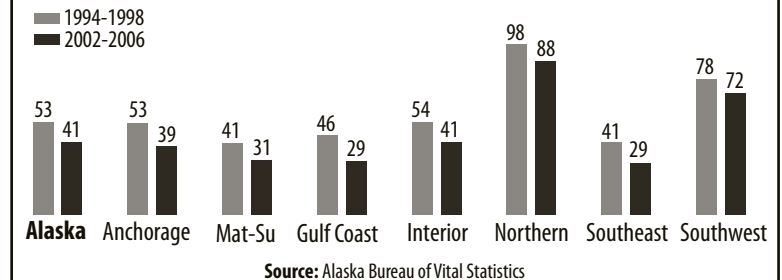
The increase in birth rates in 2006 wasn't only among teenagers, but among almost every group of women of child-bearing age in the U.S. The two exceptions were the birth rate among mothers under 15, which declined, and among mothers 45-49, which held steady.

Many people speculate that one of the reasons for the increase is the growing acceptance in the U.S. and around the world that women can work and raise children as well. This speculation is in part because the increase isn't occurring solely in the U.S. A number of countries—including the United Kingdom, France, Japan, South Korea, and the Czech Republic—have seen increases in their birth rates in recent years.

But the teen birth rate in the U.S. continues to be above that of other developed countries. At this point there isn't a clear explanation for the increase specifically in teen birth rates. It's also unknown whether the 2006 increase is a reversal in the trend or an anomaly—or whether the long-term decrease in birth rates has plateaued.<sup>10</sup>

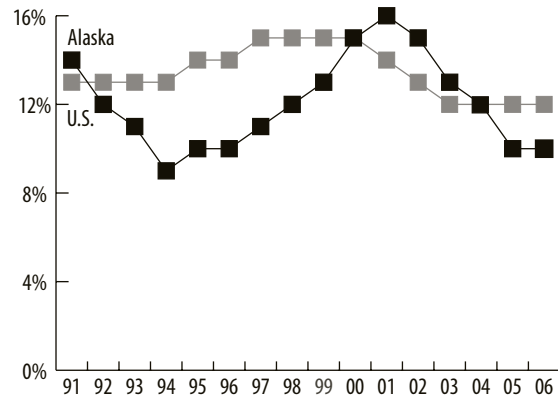
## Birth Rates by Region, 1994-1998 and 2002-2006

(Rate per 1,000 Girls 15-19, 5-Year Averages)



Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

**Percent of Children Without Health Insurance\*  
U.S. and Alaska, 1991-2006**



\*This source includes as "uninsured" children who are eligible to receive medical care through the Alaska Area Native Health Service.

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. Each year is the midpoint of a 3-year average.

## DEFINITION

This indicator estimates the percentage of children under the age of 19 without health insurance. That might seem a straightforward indicator to measure, but it's not. There are different ways of defining who is uninsured, and there are also concerns about the accuracy of the responses and the estimates. Most of the estimates we include here are from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), but we also include other sources.

A special concern about CPS data for Alaska is that Alaska Native children—who are eligible to receive health services through the Alaska Area Native Health Service—are counted as being "uninsured." These children do not have standard health insurance; they must go to Alaska Native health clinics or hospitals to receive care. But they do have access to medical care. So when the American Academy of Pediatrics analyzes CPS data, it classifies Alaska Native children as being insured.

CPS data is currently the best source of information on children and health insurance, but many analysts believe it probably underestimates the number of children without insurance. The survey classifies children as uninsured only if they were without insurance

the entire year before the survey. Children who had insurance for any portion of the year—no matter how briefly—are counted as insured.

Another concern about CPS data is that the CPS itself is designed to provide accurate estimates at the national level, not for individual states. The survey samples a portion of the population, and in states with large populations this doesn't create a significant problem—because the sample size is larger. But in Alaska, where the population and the sample are smaller, the estimates for a single year can contain a substantial amount of error. We address that problem by presenting an average of data over three years whenever we can. But that's not always possible, and we recommend caution in using figures in this section that are based on less than three years' data.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The majority of American families without health insurance have annual incomes under \$20,000—and surprisingly, most of the uninsured are in working families. A 2005 survey by the Commonwealth Fund found that among the 48 million American adults who had been uninsured in the previous year, 67% were in working families with at least one person working full-time.<sup>1</sup>

A more recent study by Families USA also reported that while most people receive insurance through their employers, four out of five uninsured Americans were from working families in 2007-2008.<sup>2</sup> Over two-thirds were in families with workers employed full-time. The study summarized problems for the uninsured:

1. They are less likely to have a usual source of care outside the emergency room.
2. They often go without screenings or preventive care.
3. They often delay or forego needed medical care.
4. They are sicker and die earlier than those who have insurance.
5. They pay more for care—and so do the rest of us.

There are several easily overlooked economic implications of being uninsured. One is that Americans without insurance increase costs for everyone. Insurance companies are able to negotiate special rates for their enrollees with doctors and hospitals. People

without insurance are not able to negotiate these lower rates and so are often charged more.

And while the uninsured typically try to pay their medical bills, they don't pay them all, and providers are left with what they call "uncompensated care." In 2005, one estimate was that this uncompensated care increased the annual premium for family health insurance provided by employers by \$922.

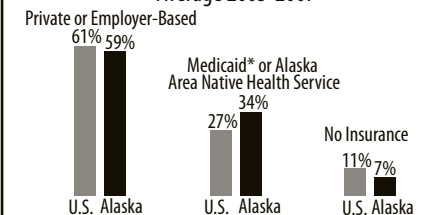
It's also estimated that the American economy loses between \$100 and \$200 billion in productivity annually because uninsured workers tend to be in poorer health and have shorter life spans. Also, most Americans are covered by Medicare, beginning at age 65. Researchers have found that those who were uninsured before they became Medicare beneficiaries need more services and care than those who had been insured.<sup>3</sup>

## DATA

The graph at the upper left shows the trend in uninsured children, based on unadjusted CPS data. It puts the share of Alaska children without health insurance at 10% in 2006. But that includes Alaska Native children who have access to care through the Alaska Area Native Health Service. It estimates the share of uninsured children around the country at 12% in 2006. The figure below shows the source of health care coverage for children 18 and under, based again on CPS data but adjusted by the American Academy of Pediatrics—which counts Alaska Native children as insured. With that adjustment, the share of Alaska children without insurance drops to 7%.

**Health-Care Coverage for Children (18 and Under), Alaska and U.S.**

Average 2005-2007



\*Includes Denali KidCare

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, based on Current Population Survey

# Health-Care Coverage

Both figures on the previous page use an average of three years of Alaska's CPS data to compensate for the small number of responses obtained in any one year. The percentage of children who were uninsured didn't change from what it was in the previous reporting period (2004, 2005, 2006).

The American Academy of Pediatrics estimates that 12,521 Alaska children were uninsured during the 2005-2007 period, and that 4,820 (39%) were eligible for Medicaid or Denali KidCare—Alaska's program that covers children and pregnant women whose families earn too much to qualify for traditional Medicaid but not enough to afford private insurance.

Currently, Denali KidCare covers children in families who earn up to 175% of the federal poverty threshold. In fall 2008 Sarah Palin, who was Alaska's governor at the time, announced that she supported increasing the income guideline to 200% of the poverty threshold. That would have meant about 1,300 more children and 225 pregnant women would have been eligible for coverage.<sup>4</sup> But the 2009 state legislature did not increase the income limit.

The table above provides more detail on health-care coverage by source, but it is for people of all ages, not just children—if the data were available just for children, the picture might be somewhat different. Also, the data are for a single year, so the figures should be used as a general rather than a precise indication of the sources of coverage.

The percentage of Alaskans covered by Medicare is smaller than it is nationwide; Alaska has fewer residents over 65. But the share of people who have coverage through the military is much higher in Alaska, because Alaska has a large military presence. The percentage of Alaskans covered by Medicaid is also somewhat higher. The table includes an estimate of Alaskans with Indian Health Service benefits, but a national estimate isn't available.

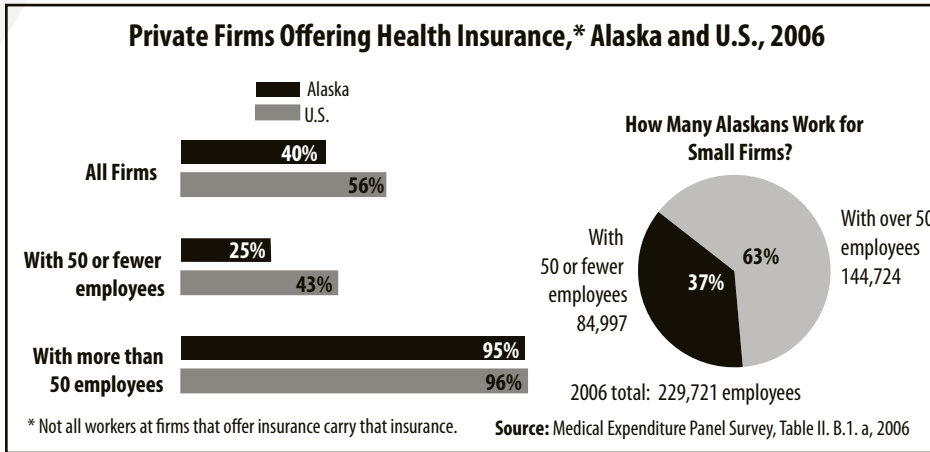
Fewer Alaskans than other Americans are covered by private health insurance. The figure below the table shows it is in small private firms that the difference lies. Only about 25% of small private firms in Alaska offer health insurance, compared with 43% around the country.

### Health-Care Coverage, Alaska and U.S., 2007

	Private Insurance	Medicaid	Medicare	Military	IHS only*	None
<b>Alaska</b>	63.4%	11.4%	7.5%	14.0%	4.2%	18.2%
<b>U.S.</b>	67.5%	13.2%	13.8%	3.7%	N/A	15.3%

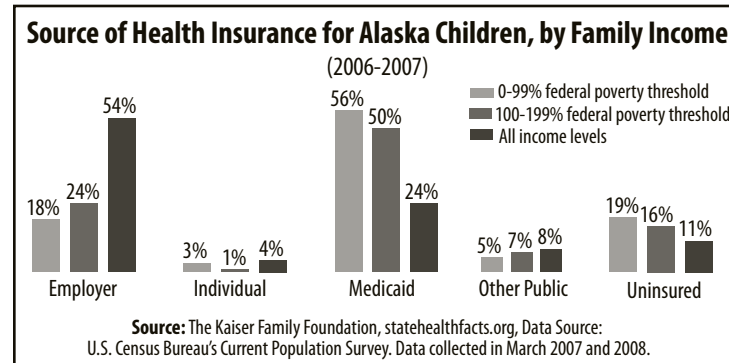
Note: Totals add to more than 100% because some people have more than one type of coverage.  
 \* U.S. Census Bureau figures classify people who receive care through the Indian Health Service as "uninsured." Based on a study by the University of Minnesota in the late 1990s, Mark Foster and Associates estimated the share of Alaskans covered by IHS only and subtracted them from the uninsured category.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

The final graph shows the source of insurance for Alaska children, by family income, for 2006 and 2007. Not unexpectedly, Alaskans with lower incomes are less likely to have insurance through employers and more likely to be eligible for Medicaid or to be uninsured. That's true not only of those with incomes below the federal poverty line, but also of those with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty line.



Keep in mind two points when considering this figure showing health insurance by income. First, it is unadjusted CPS data, which counts children who are covered only by the Indian Health Service as uninsured.

Second, it is based on only two years of data. We prefer, when possible, to average three years of data.



And more Alaskans work for small firms—37% of all private-sector workers in Alaska worked for small firms in 2006, compared with 28% nationwide. (Government employees are not included in this figure.) The structure of the Alaska economy helps explain the difference, because Alaska has a great deal of seasonal employment, and a lot of the small firms are seasonal.



### ENDNOTES FOR CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

1. Rebecca M. Blank, "How to Improve Poverty Measurement in the United States," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Volume 27, Number 2, Spring 2008, Bloomington, IN, 2008.
2. Constance F. Citro and R. T. Michael, editors, *Measuring Poverty: A New Approach*, Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance: Concepts, Information Needs, and Measurement Methods; Committee on National Statistics; Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1995.
3. Lori Pflingst, "The Cost of Child Poverty State by State," Human Services Policy Center, Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington; Washington Kids Count, Seattle, Washington, 2008.
4. Harry J. Holzer, D. W. Schazenbach, G. Duncan, and J. Ludwig, "The Economic Costs of Poverty in the United States: Subsequent Effects of Children Growing Up Poor," Working Paper Series # 07-04, Center for American Progress, Washington, D.C., January 2007.
5. Linda Hoffman, "State Strategies to Reduce Child and Family Poverty," National Governors Association, Issue Brief, June 2008. Retrieved September 2008: <http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.9123e83a1f6786440ddcbbeb501010a0/?vgnnextoid=7eaa021bf995a110VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD>.
6. See note 5.
7. The data for this measure are from the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, a model-based estimate from several sources.
8. "School Breakfast Scorecard: School Year 2007-2008," Food Research and Action Center, Washington, D.C., January 2009. Retrieved February 2009: <http://www.frac.org/pdf/breakfast08.pdf>.
9. "School Meals Data Fact Sheet," Food Bank of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, November, 2008.
10. The U.S. DA has three levels of reimbursement; this is the highest.
11. See note 8.
12. To learn more, go to <http://www.brookings.edu/topics/earned-income-tax-credit.aspx>.

### ENDNOTES FOR NO PARENT WORKING FULL-TIME

1. Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2008 Kids Count National Data Book*, page 54.
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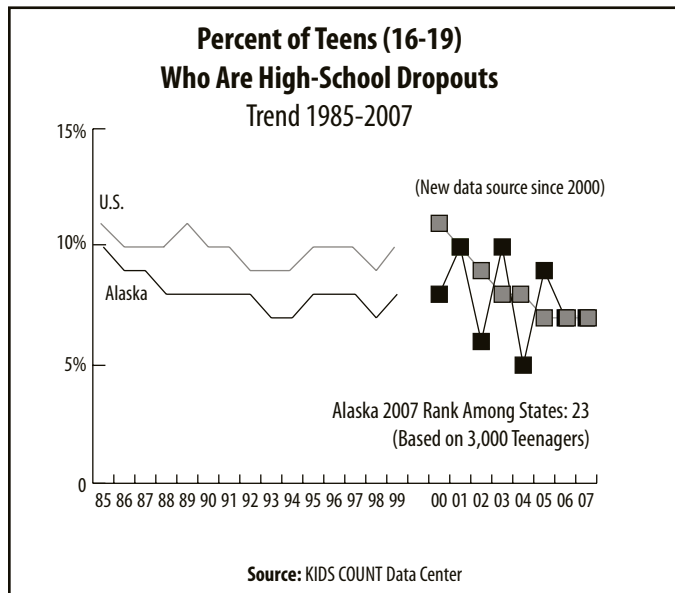
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*Education*





**DEFINITIONS**

The Future of Children—which promotes good public policies for children—recently observed, “Given the importance of graduation rates as a performance metric of the nation’s high schools, one might assume the existence of well-defined, well-agreed-upon measures of that performance. One would be wrong.”<sup>1</sup>

There are three commonly used methods for calculating dropout rates and seven for graduation rates. There has been considerable debate over which methods might be the best. Unfortunately, having so many rates has led to confusion and mistaken comparisons. The various rates are based on different numbers and measure different things.

The trend graph above uses what is known as a “status” dropout rate: the percentage of teenagers ages 16 through 19 who are not enrolled in high school and have not graduated. Teens who have general equivalency diplomas (GEDs) are considered graduates and are not included in the graph. These data are from the American Community Survey and reflect dropouts among all the U.S. and Alaska teenagers in that age range.

By contrast, the data we present from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development uses an “event” dropout rate. The department defines a dropout this way: “A student who was enrolled in the district at some time during the school year whose enrollment terminated. Dropouts do not include graduates, transfers to public or private schools, or transfers to state- or district-approved education programs. Students with absences due to suspension, illness, or medical conditions are not reported as dropouts.”

Also, the department includes only students in Alaska’s public high schools. We report the dropout rates for two groups of teens: those in grades 7 through 12 and those in just grades 9 through 12.

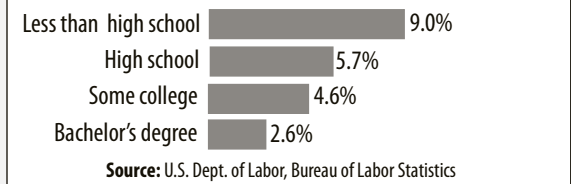
The situation is more complex when we look at the various ways graduation rates are calculated. For example, the averaged freshman graduation rate measures the percentage of students who graduate four years after they start as freshmen. The graduation rate reported by Alaska’s Department of Education—known as a “leaver” rate—is based on the number of dropouts in the prior four years, as well as those who didn’t graduate but are continuing 12th grade students. Yet another rate is based on the number of 12th grade graduates, divided by the number of 12th grade students who enrolled in the fall—so specific trends in the senior year can be isolated. Each of these measures can be helpful in answering specific questions, but confusion can ensue when those using the measures don’t understand the differences.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

According to Elaine Chao, a former U.S. Secretary of Labor, a young person drops out of school every 26 seconds in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> That amounts to approximately 3,300 dropouts a day and more than a million in a year.<sup>3</sup>

The costs of dropping out of high school are big. High-school dropouts can expect to earn \$9,200 less a year than high-school graduates. The Alliance for Excellent Education reports high-school dropouts earn about \$260,000 less than high-school graduates

**U.S. Unemployment Rate by Education Level, 2008**



over their lifetimes—and that if everyone in the class of 2008 had graduated, the nation would have gained an additional \$319 billion over the course of their lifetimes.<sup>4</sup> Also, college graduates can expect to earn a million dollars more than high-school dropouts during their working lives.<sup>5,6</sup>

Compared with those who finish high school, dropouts are significantly more likely to live in poverty, rely on public assistance, be unemployed, and suffer from health problems.<sup>7</sup> Young Americans who fail to finish high school—especially men—are also eight times more likely to be incarcerated than those who do finish.<sup>8</sup>

The bar chart above shows unemployment rates for those with different levels of education, and it’s clear that those with the least education have the highest unemployment rates. Unemployment increased nationwide from 2006 to 2008—but rates increased the most among those with the least education.

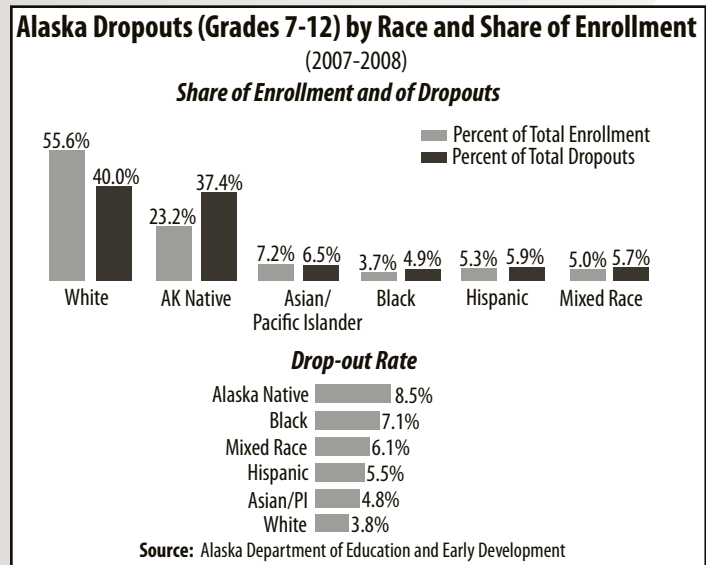
**DROPOUT RATES**

As the trend graph at the upper left shows, the percentage of Alaska teenagers (ages 16-19) who didn’t finish high school varied considerably—from 5% to 10%—in recent years. In 2007, Alaska’s dropout rate of 7% ranked the state 23rd in the nation on this indicator—equal to the national average that year. These figures are based on data from the American Community Survey.

Data from Alaska’s Department of Education and Early Development allow us to look at differences in dropout rates among students by age, region of the state, and race.

There were 41,644 students enrolled in grades 9-12 in Alaska's public high schools in the 2007-2008 school year; 3,039 (or 7.3%) dropped out. A total of 61,418 students were enrolled in grades 7-12 that year; 3,232 (or a little more than 5%) dropped out.

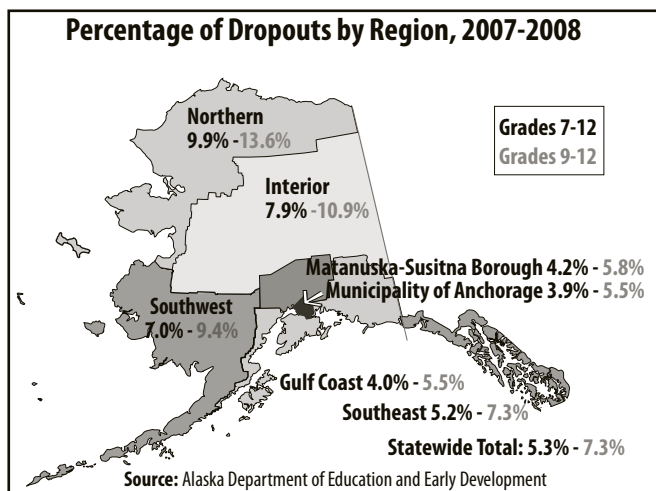
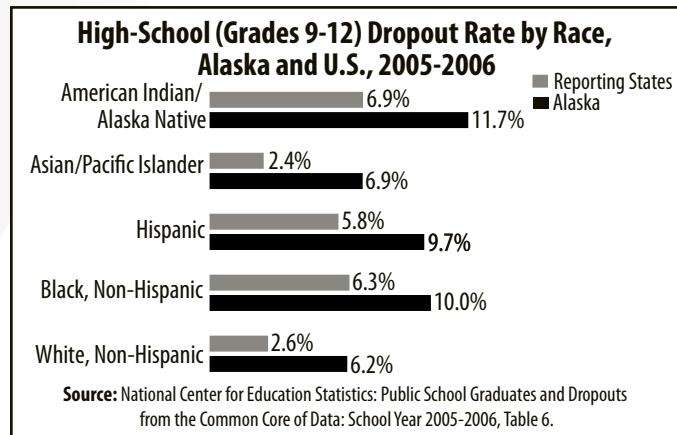
The chart below shows racial and ethnic disparities among Alaska students who drop out. More than one-third (37.4%) of all those who dropped out of grades 7 through 12 in 2007-2008 were Alaska Native, although less than 25% of all students in those



grades are Alaska Native. The dropout rates among both Alaska Native (8.5%) and Black students (7.1%) are roughly twice the rate for White students in Alaska.

The bar chart at the top of the page shows a similar pattern nationwide: American Indian and Black students drop out at far higher rates than White students. The chart also shows that in the 2005-2006 school year, Alaska's high-school students of all races dropped out at higher rates than their counterparts nationwide.

Dropout rates also vary considerably by region in Alaska. The map shows that the highest dropout rate is in the Northern region, where nearly 14% of students in grades 9 through 12 and nearly 10% of those in grades 7 through 12 dropped out in the



2007-2008 school year. Dropout rates in the Interior and Southwest regions are also high. About 10% of high-school students and 7% to 8% of those in grades 7 through 12 dropped out in 2007-2008. The rate was lowest in Anchorage, which has slightly over 40% of the state's students; about 4% of high-school students dropped out.

### HIGH-SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

The only measure of graduation rates that is comparable across the states comes from the National Center for Education Statistics, which calculates an averaged freshman graduation rate. It is the percentage of an entering freshman class that graduates within four years. Each state provides numbers, and the rate is calculated

in the same way across all states. It's an effort to measure on-time graduation, as is required by the Adequate Yearly Progress provisions in the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It excludes students who receive GEDs or certificates rather than regular diplomas.

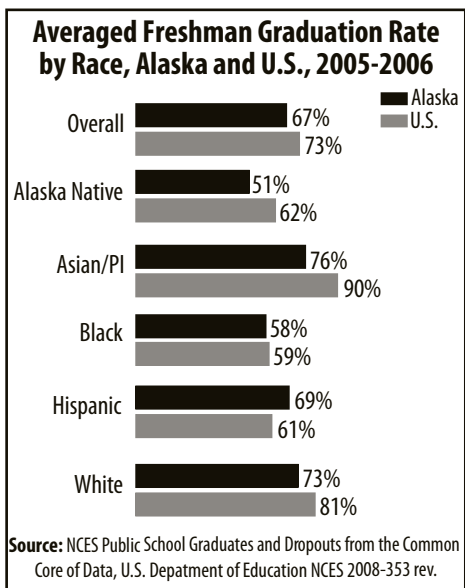
Data from 2005-2006 is the most recent available. In that year, the averaged freshman graduation rate nationwide was 73%. That means approximately three in four students who had entered 9th grade four years earlier graduated with regular diplomas in 2005-2006.

In Alaska, the rate was lower—only about two in three students who had started high school four years earlier graduated in 2005-2006. The bar chart on the facing page shows that with one exception, students of all races in Alaska lagged the U.S. average in graduation rates that year. Only Hispanic students graduated at higher rates in Alaska (69%) than nationwide (61%).

The line graph shows graduation rates under two measures. The two lines marked with squares show the averaged freshman graduation rate in Alaska and the entire U.S. On that measure, Alaska's graduation rate has been below the national average since the 2000-01 school year. In 2004-05, Alaska's rate fell furthest below the U.S. average, at 10 percentage points lower.

Wisconsin had the highest averaged freshman graduation rate in 2005-06, at 87.5%, and 13 other states had rates above 80%. Only six states had rates lower than Alaska's that year, with Nevada's rate of 55.8% at the bottom.<sup>9</sup>

The third line on the graph, marked with triangles, shows why it's difficult to compare graduation rates under different measures. That line shows Alaska graduation rates as calculated by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development from 2000 through 2006. During that period the department itself used two different methods of calculating graduation rates.

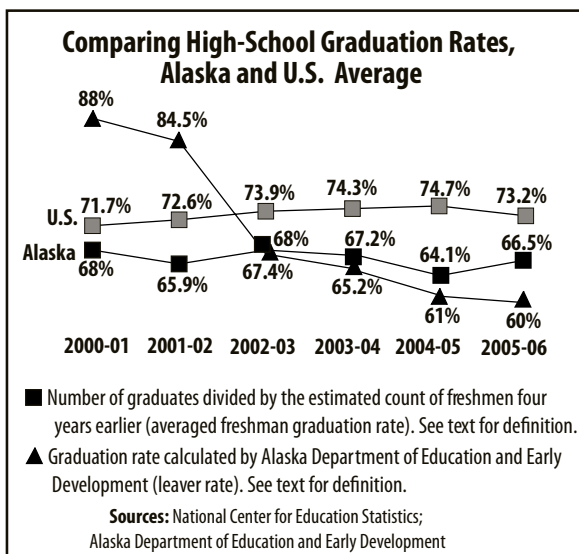


But since 2003, the department has used the “leaver” rate we described earlier, based on the number of dropouts in the prior four years, as well as those who didn’t graduate but are continuing 12th grade students.<sup>10</sup>

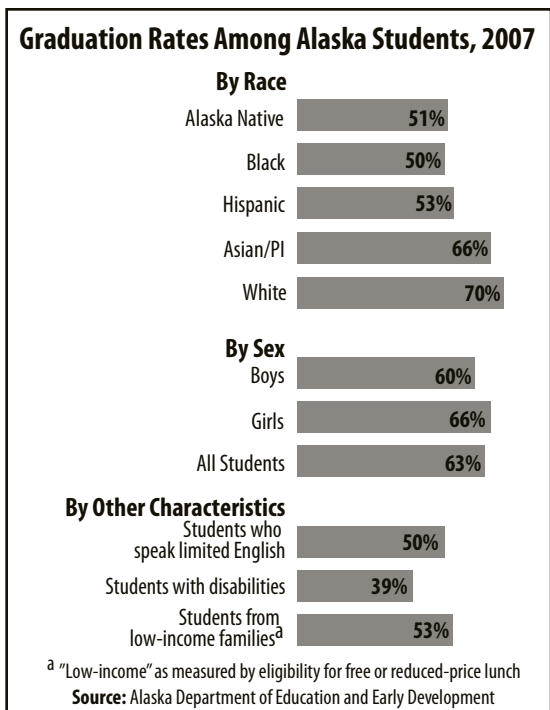
Under the leaver rate, Alaska’s graduation rate is much lower. That method of calculation more closely fits what is required under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Federal regulations passed in 2008 set specific guidelines for calculating graduation rates, and the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development has reported it will be able to comply with those guidelines by 2011.

We have national data only through 2006, but we have Alaska graduation data from the Alaska Department of Education for the 2006-2007 school year, as shown below.

In 2007, 63% of Alaska high-school students—7,666 students—graduated with regular diplomas. (That excludes students who received GEDs or certificates.) But graduation rates vary a lot among Alaska students with different characteristics.



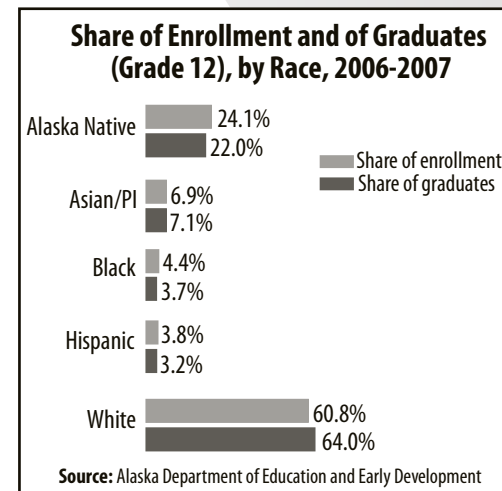
For the first two years, the department measured the graduation rate based on the number of students on the last day of school—meaning that students who had dropped out before the last day of school weren’t part of the calculation. So the graduation rate for those years looked higher.

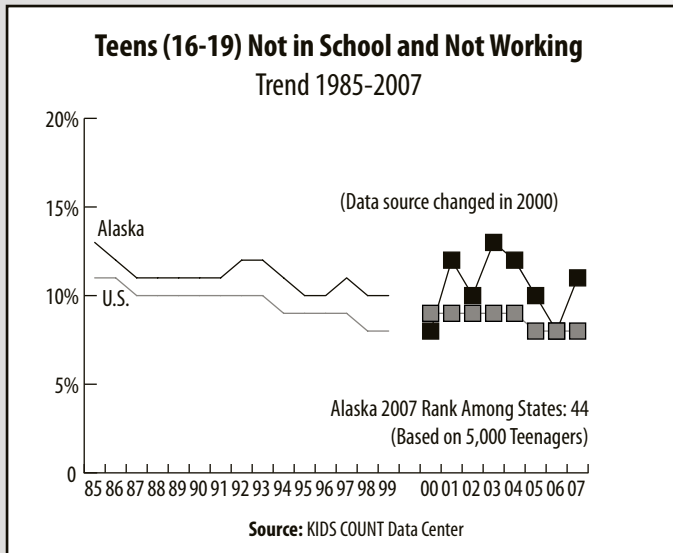


Girls in Alaska graduate at higher rates than boys. Minority students graduate at lower rates than White students. Students who speak limited English or come from low-income families also graduate at lower rates. Graduation rates are lowest among students with disabilities.

The final graduation figure shows how graduation rates compare with shares of enrollment among students in the 12th grade. This is a different measure from those we just reported. It focuses specifically on what happens to Alaska students in their senior year of high school: what percentages of students who start their senior year graduate at the end of the year? The figures are for the 2006-2007 school year, and the denominator used to calculate the percentages is the number of students enrolled in the 12th grade as of October 1, 2006.

Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic seniors are less likely to graduate—that is, their shares of enrollment at the beginning of the senior year are larger than their shares of graduates. White and Asian/Pacific Island students are more likely to graduate. Their shares of graduates are actually larger than their shares of enrollment—because more students of other races fail to graduate.





## DEFINITION

The trend graph above shows the percentage of teenagers, ages 16 through 19, who are not attending school, not in the military, and not employed either part- or full-time. This indicator includes both high-school dropouts and those with general equivalency diplomas (GEDs). Most data reported in this section come from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), including the data on teenagers not working as well as data on college attendance and median earnings of young adults in Alaska.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Most American teenagers spend their days either in school or working—or both. They are doing things that help prepare them to become self-sufficient, competent adults. An alarming number of teenagers, however, are not on this path.

Teenagers who aren't in school or working have been labeled in various ways: disconnected, disengaged, and idle. However you label them, these teenagers are at serious risk of a lifetime of unemployment, poverty, and incarceration. Why do so many teenagers end up in this position? Several things predict who might end up in this group: (1) teen pregnancy, (2) juvenile delinquency, (3) being in foster care, and (4) dropping out of school.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of why teenagers become disconnected, adults need to help reconnect them. For example, school-to-work programs that emphasize developing skills are likely to help teenagers become and stay engaged in the workforce and to demonstrate the value of education.<sup>3</sup>

## DATA

As the trend graph to the left shows, one in twelve—or 8%—of 16- to 19-year-olds in the U.S. were not in school, in the work force, or in the military in 2007.

If we look just at older teenagers—those 18 and 19—the share not working and not in school was considerably higher in 2007, at 13%.<sup>4</sup> The share of teens nationwide who were unemployed and not in school was stable from 2004 through 2007, but it's likely higher in the current recession.

In Alaska in 2007, 11% of teenagers aged 16-19 were neither employed nor attending school. Alaska had one of the highest rates of disconnected teens in the U.S. that year, ranking 44th among states. The share of disconnected teenagers in Alaska is much more volatile than the national rate. In recent years it has varied from a high of 13% in 2003 to a low of 8% in 2006.

We don't have Alaska data on the share of disconnected teenagers by sex and race, but the table below shows national data from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics for 1997 and 2006.

**Percentages of U.S. Teenagers (16-19) Not in School and Not Working, 1997 and 2006**

	1997	2006	Change
All 16-19	9%	8%	-11%
Teenage Girls	10%	8%	-20%
Teenage Boys	8%	7%	-13%
White Teenagers	7%	6%	-14%
Black Teenagers	14%	11%	-21%
Hispanic Teenagers	14%	11%	-21%

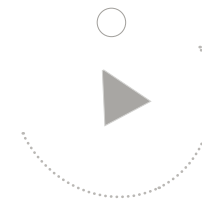
Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

Overall, the percentage of disconnected teenagers in the U.S. dropped from 9% in 1997 to 8% in 2006. That percentage was down among both girls and boys and among all races. But the biggest declines were among girls (down from 10% to 8%) and Black and Hispanic teenagers (down from 14% to 11%). Still, in 2006 the percentage of disconnected Black and Hispanic teenagers was nearly twice that of White teenagers, and girls were still somewhat more likely than boys to be disconnected.

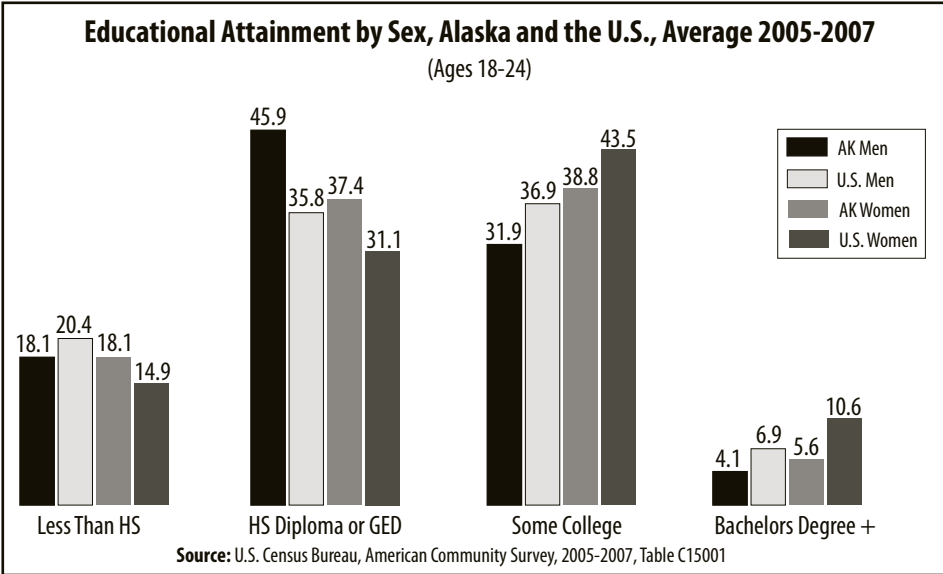
How might Alaska's higher percentages of disconnected teenagers translate into education levels among young adults (18 to 24)? The figure on the facing page shows American Community Survey estimates of educational attainment among young men and women in Alaska and the nation as a whole for 2005-2007.

The figure on the facing page shows that young women—nationwide and in Alaska—are more likely to have some college credit than young men, especially men in Alaska. In the country as a whole, 44% of young women had at least some college credit, as did 39% of young women in Alaska. Nationwide, 37% of young men had at least some college credit, compared with about 32% in Alaska.

Young women across the country were the most likely to have earned 4-year or higher degrees, with 11% holding college degrees in the 2005-2007 period. About 7% of young men nationwide held college degrees. In Alaska, about 6% of young women and less than 5% of young men had college degrees.



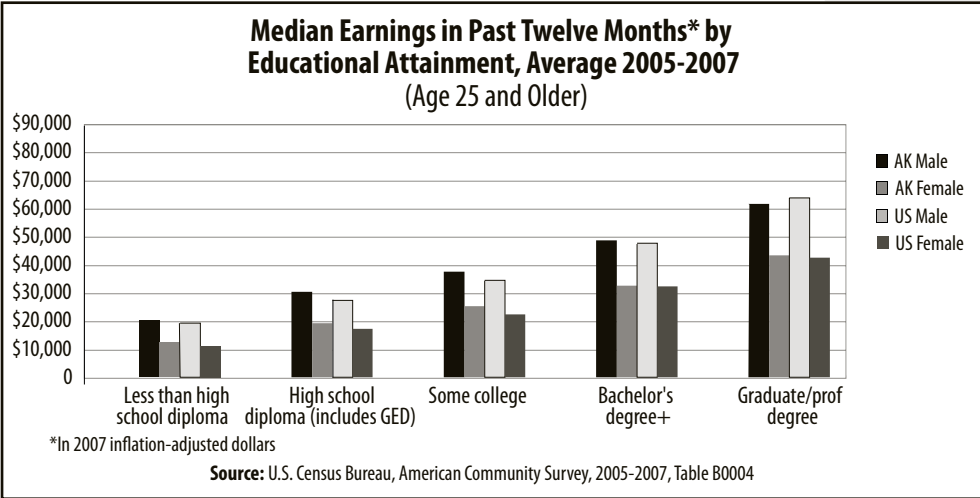




But whatever their education level, women—in Alaska and nationwide—earn less than men with the same level of education. As the graph to the right shows, women with less education earn more in Alaska than they do in the country as a whole. But among women with more education, median earnings are about the same in Alaska and nationwide.

Men in Alaska enjoy the best earnings at all education levels except the highest. Among men with graduate or professional degrees, the U.S. median income is higher than Alaska's.

It is critical that we try to understand work and education trends for young Alaskans. The current weak economy means there will be stiff competition for all jobs, not just those that are high-paying. Staying engaged in school and work in their teenage years is the clear path to greater success for young Alaskans.



## DEFINITION

State law requires the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to conduct statewide tests to assess the academic skills of school children. The department's comprehensive system of student assessment includes developmental profiles for kindergarteners and first-graders, standards-based assessments in third through tenth grades, national norm-referenced testing of fifth and seventh graders, and a High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam students must pass to receive high-school diplomas.

And in preparing to apply for college, a bigger share of Alaska's high-school students take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or American College Achievement Test (ACT) than their counterparts nationwide. The SAT assesses math, critical reading, and writing skills; the ACT examines English, math, reading, and science skills.

This year, we report scores on the California Achievement Test, Sixth Edition (TerraNova, version 2), as one measure of Alaska's school achievement. Schools nationwide use that test to assess achievement in reading, math, and language arts. It's a norm-referenced test—meaning we can use it to compare students in Alaska with students nationwide. In the 2006-2007 school year, the CAT/6 was administered to fifth and seventh graders across Alaska, and about 95% of students in those grades took the test.

The CAT/6 scores of all U.S. students are divided into quartiles, with 25% scoring in the top (highest-achieving) quartile, 25% in the bottom (lowest-achieving quartile), and the remaining 50% in the two middle quartiles.

We can compare the distribution of scores among Alaska's students to this normed distribution, where exactly 25% of scores fall into each quartile. So if on a given test more than 25% of Alaska children score in the top quartile, and fewer than 25% score in the bottom quartile, we can conclude that Alaska students scored above the U.S. average on that test.

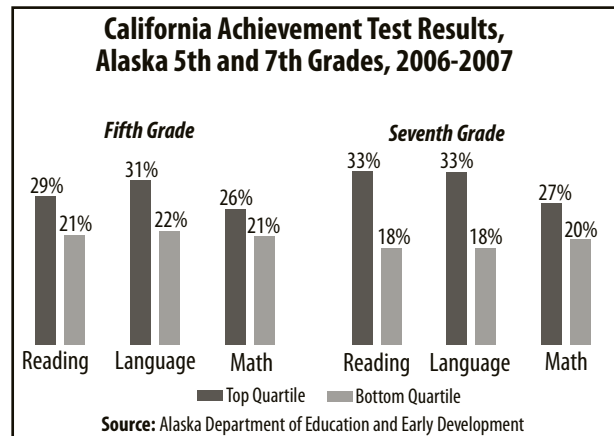
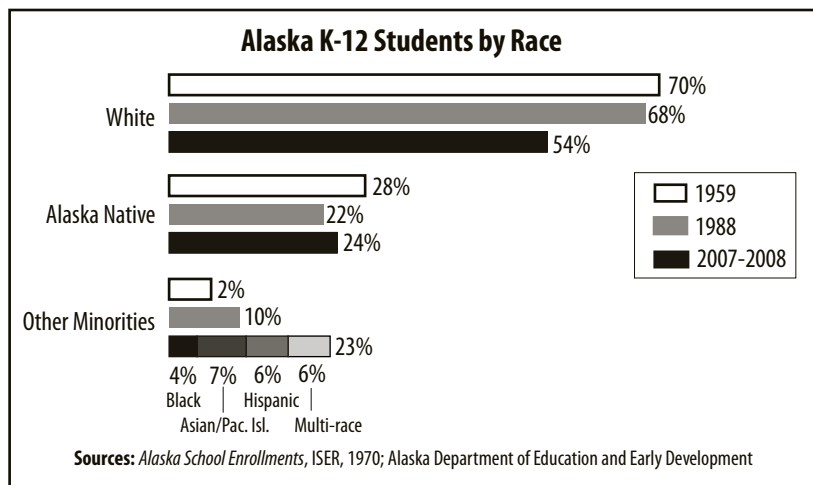
Besides completing courses in specific topic areas, Alaska students are required to pass the High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam, which is intended to measure minimum competency in skills students should master by the time they leave high school. We report the results of the spring 2008 exam.

We also compare 2007 scores of Alaska's high-school seniors to U.S. averages on the two standardized tests most widely used as indicators of whether students are prepared for college: the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT). Colleges use these test scores (and other measures) in decisions about admission, course placement, and scholarships.

## NUMBER AND RACE OF STUDENTS

There were about 133,000 students enrolled in Alaska's K-12 schools during the 2007-2008 year. Those students have become increasingly diverse since Alaska became a state—in 1959—and especially in the past 20 years.

About 54% of students identified themselves as White in 2007, down from 68% in 1988. Almost one-quarter (23%) identified themselves as Alaska Native—a proportion that has stayed close to the same over the years, even as the total number of students increased substantially. The share of students from other minorities increased from 2% in 1959 to 10% by 1988 and then to 23% between 1988 and 2007.



## READING AND LANGUAGE

Alaska's fifth and seventh graders scored above the national average in reading on the CAT/6 in 2006-2007. Approximately one in three—33% of seventh graders and 29% of fifth graders—scored in the top quartile on the reading portion of the test, while fewer than 18% of seventh graders and 21% of fifth graders scored in the bottom quartile. The results of the language arts portion of the test were very similar.

Gender	Reading		Math	
	5th	7th	5th	7th
Boys	28%	30%	28%	29%
Girls	30%	36%	24%	26%

Race and Ethnicity	Reading	Math
Alaska Native	12%	11%
White	40%	34%
Black	16%	11%
Hispanic	21%	20%
Asian/Pacific Islander	23%	25%
Mixed Races	28%	25%

Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

There were some differences by sex and race in CAT/6 reading and language arts scores, as the table shows. More girls than boys scored in the top quartile in reading, in both the fifth and seventh grades. White students in both grades were the most likely to score in the top quartile and Alaska Native students the least likely.

**MATHEMATICS**

Alaska students were less likely to score in the top quartile in math, in both the 5th and 7th grades—although they were still slightly above national averages. And only about 20% of Alaska students in both grades scored in the bottom quartile in math—meaning fewer Alaska students scored at the bottom than was the case nationwide.

Boys tended to outscore girls on the math portion of the CAT/6 in both fifth and seventh grades. And among both fifth and seventh grade students in Alaska, at least 25% of students from three racial groups scored in the top quartile: White, Asian or Pacific Islander, and mixed race.

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION QUALIFYING EXAM**

Alaska’s school districts establish graduation requirements that must meet or exceed the state’s standards. To receive regular high-school diplomas, students must earn 21 credits, complete credits in specified areas, and pass the High School Graduation Qualifying

Exam (HSGQE). The exam tests students’ abilities in reading, writing, and math. Students first take the exam in tenth grade and may retake it until they pass all sections. Those who don’t pass receive certificates of achievement instead of diplomas.

The Alaska Board of Education establishes the proficiency level students need to pass the exam. But the board has adjusted those levels a number of times, so scores across years are not exactly comparable.

The other exams we’ve discussed are designed to test achievement across time and across states, while the HSGQE tests for minimum competence. Still, there are similar patterns in the results: girls score higher than boys in all subjects except math, mixed race and White students tend to have higher scores, and students from families with higher incomes do better.

Overall, at least three-quarters of all those who take the exam pass all the sections, but the highest scores are in reading. The figure below details of the results of the spring 2008 exam.

**COLLEGE PREPARATION**

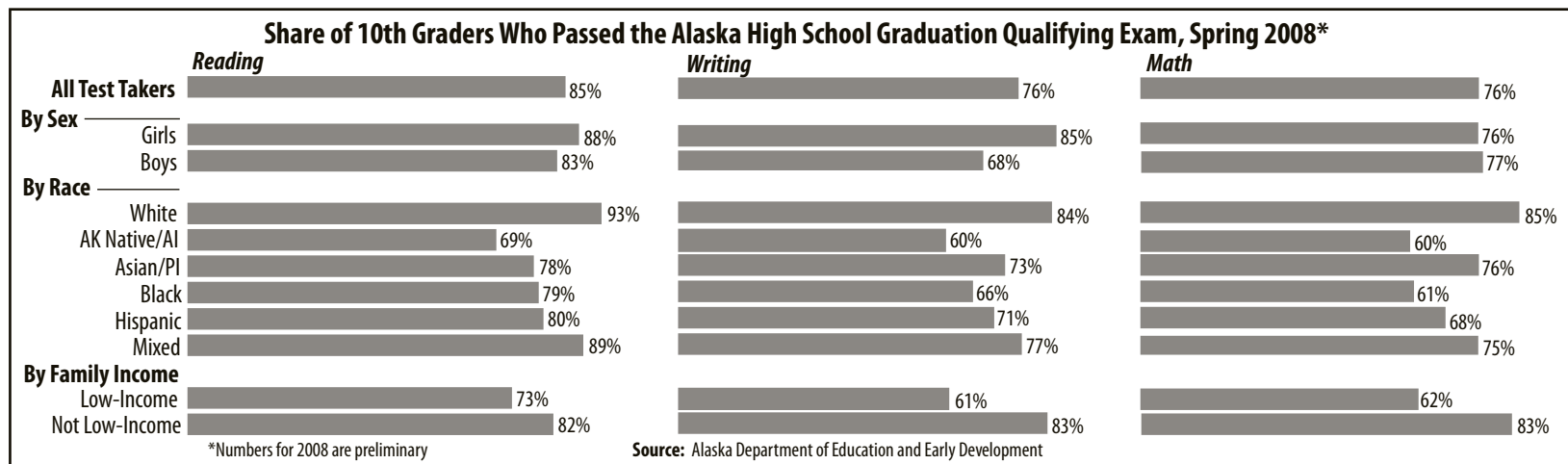
The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT) are commonly used indicators of students’ readiness for college. While participation in these tests is voluntary, most colleges require students to submit scores from one or the other as a part of the admission process.

Alaska’s students appear to have the reading skills required for college. The average SAT critical reading score for students graduating from Alaska’s public school system in 2007 was 518—20 points above the national average of 498. The maximum possible score is 800.

On the ACT, Alaska’s seniors had an average score of 21.8—very close to the U.S. average of 21.5. The maximum possible score is 36.

Seniors in Alaska’s public schools also scored somewhat higher (518) than their peers nationwide (509) on the math portion of the SAT. Again, the maximum score is 800.

Math scores on the ACT for Alaska’s graduating seniors, however were roughly comparable to the national average—21.3 compared with 21.0. The highest possible score is 36.

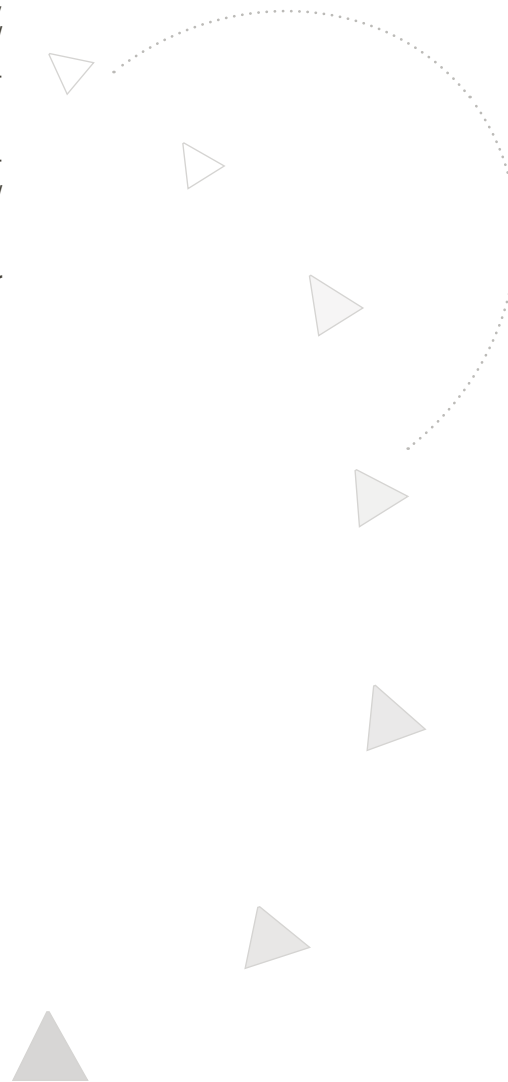


### ENDNOTES FOR TEENS WHO DROP OUT

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7. See note 6.
8. See note 6.
9. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2005-06, First Look*. Retrieved May 2009: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid+2008353rev>.
10. Specifically, the number of graduates receiving diplomas before June 30th is divided by the sum of the number of graduates, plus the number of dropouts in grade 9 three years prior, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts in grade 10 two years prior, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts in grade 11 in the prior year, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts in grade 12 during the current year, plus the number of grade 12 continuing students.

### ENDNOTES FOR TEENS NOT IN SCHOOL AND NOT WORKING

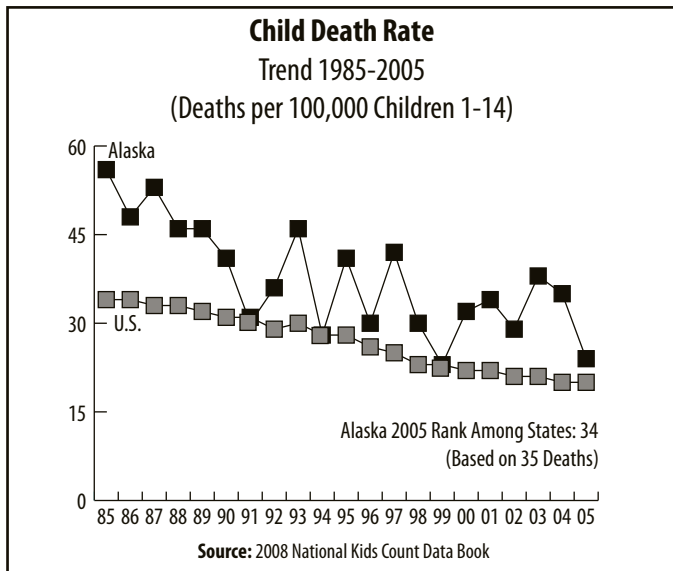
1. R. Shore, *Reducing the Number of Disconnected Youth*, Kids Count Indicator Brief, Annie E. Casey Foundation, July 2005.
2. C. Dervarics, *Minorities Overrepresented Among America's Disconnected Youth*, Population Reference Bureau, August 2004, Washington, D.C. Retrieved February 2009: <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2004/MinoritiesOverrepresentedAmongAmericasDisconnectedYouth.aspx>.
3. B. Brown, Child Trends Research Brief, August 2001, Washington D.C. Retrieved March 2009: [http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2001\\_08\\_01\\_RB\\_TeensJobs.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2001_08_01_RB_TeensJobs.pdf).
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*Children in Danger*





Summer is an especially risky time for children. They are out of school and spend more time in and around water, on bicycles and skateboards, and in motor vehicles. A 2007 study by Safe Kids Worldwide found that Alaska had the second highest childhood death rate in the U.S. during summers from 2000-2004.<sup>3</sup> On average, the rate among Alaska kids 14 and under was nearly 8 per 100,000 between May and August each year—double the U.S. rate of fewer than 4 per 100,000.

Many accidental deaths could be prevented if children always used basic safety equipment. Alaskans clearly need to improve efforts to make sure children use such equipment. Using life-vests or personal flotation devices can cut the risk of drowning in boating accidents by 85%.<sup>4</sup> Helmets have been proven to reduce serious injuries in bicycle, all-terrain vehicle (ATV), and skateboard accidents.

The table shows the manner of death among Alaskans ages 1 through 17 from 2002 through 2006, reported by the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. Accidents were the single largest cause (43.3%), followed by natural causes (30.4%), suicides (13.7%), and homicides (8.2%). But there's a big difference in causes of death among older and younger children. The vast majority of deaths (88%) among those under age 10 were from natural causes or accidents, compared with 67% among those 10-17. Nearly a third of deaths among older children were due to suicide (20%) or homicide (10%).

## DEFINITION

The child death rate is the number of deaths per 100,000 children ages 1 to 14, from all causes (natural, accidental, and intentional). Regional data reflect the child's place of residence, not place of death. Please note that the child death rate presented here is for children over the age of one; deaths during the first year of life are reported in a separate section, Infant Mortality. Also note that information on how children die in Alaska is for a wider age range of children—ages 1 through 17.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Accidents kill far more American children than anything else. Drowning, suffocation, burns, and pedestrian accidents are among the leading causes of accidental death among U.S. children ages 1 to 14.<sup>1</sup> But the number one cause of accidental death is motor vehicle crashes, which kill about 2,400 American children 14 and under annually. The only bright spot here is that many of these deaths could be prevented. Using infant and toddler car seats reduces the likelihood of death in car crashes by 71% for infants and 54% for toddlers. And every time an adult spends \$40 to \$50 for a child safety seat, society saves roughly \$1,900.<sup>2</sup> So safety seats not only save lives—they also make economic sense.

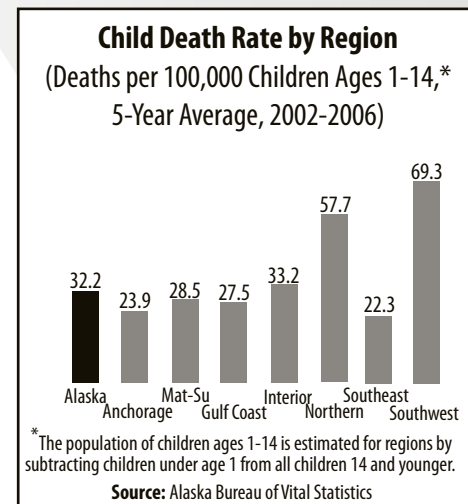
## CHILD DEATH RATE DATA

The trend graph shows that 35 Alaska children between 1 and 14 died in 2005, translating into a rate of 24 per 100,000. This rate was 20% higher than the national average of 20 per 100,000, ranking Alaska 34th among the states on this indicator.

The child death rate in Alaska was 25% lower in 2005 than in 2000, but it has been well above the U.S. average most of the past 20 years. Alaska's rate also fluctuates from year to year. Because the number of children in Alaska is small, a small change in the number of deaths can make a big change in the death rate.

To help smooth those year-to-year differences, Kids Count Alaska presents state and regional data in five-year averages—in this book, for the period from 2002 through 2006.

The bar chart shows that the statewide child death rate averaged 32 per 100,000 between 2002 and 2006, with rates in some regions more than twice as high as in others. Death rates were lowest in Southeast Alaska (22) and Anchorage (24) and highest in the Northern (58) and Southwest (69) regions.

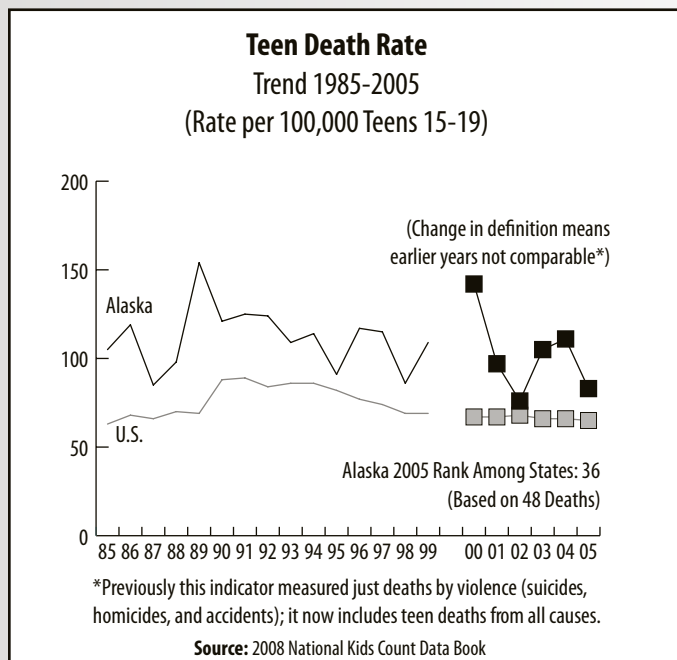


### How Do Alaska Children Die?

(Number of Deaths, by Age, 2002-2006)

	1-4	5-9	10-17	Total	Percent
Natural Causes	35	12	64	111	30.4%
Accidents	29	27	102	158	43.3%
Suicides	0	0	50	50	13.7%
Homicides	4	1	25	30	8.2%
Other	2	7	7	16	4.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics



## DEFINITION

This indicator presents three sets of statistics on teenage deaths: the overall death rate from all causes (natural and preventable), the violent death rate, and the suicide rate.

All the death rates are per 100,000 teens 15 to 19. The overall teen death rate is based on deaths from all causes. The violent death rate is based on deaths from suicides, accidents, and homicides combined. The suicide rate is based just on deaths by suicide. We present suicide figures over a 10-year period, because the numbers for some regions are very small.

## SIGNIFICANCE

When a teenager dies in the United States, it is usually the result of an accident, suicide, or homicide.<sup>1</sup> Many of these deaths are associated with risky behavior like using drugs or alcohol, having access to guns, failing to wear seat belts, or riding in cars with drivers who have been drinking. Every other year the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducts the Youth Risk Behavior Survey that allows us to monitor some of the risky

behavior and danger signals among teenagers. It's a national survey of a representative sample of high-school students across the country. It tracks changes in behavior over time and allows individual states to see how risky behavior among their teenagers compares with such behavior around the country.

American teenagers who die are most likely to be killed in some sort of accident, and most of these accidents involve motor vehicles. Certain kinds of risky behavior significantly increase the likelihood that teenagers will die. For example, when the 2007 CDC survey asked teenagers about their behavior during the previous 30 days, more than one in ten reported rarely or never wearing seatbelts. Nearly 1 in 3 said they had been passengers in cars with drivers who had been drinking alcohol, and 1 in 10 had themselves driven cars after drinking.<sup>2</sup>

Drinking seems to be an important predictor of intentional injury (suicides and homicides) as well. In the 2007 CDC survey, three-fourths of those in 9th to 12th grades across the country reported drinking alcohol at least once in their lives, and 45% said they'd used alcohol in the past month. More than 1 in 4 said they'd been on drinking binges (five or more drinks in a row within a couple of hours) in the last 30 days, and 4% had consumed alcohol while on school property.<sup>3</sup>

All this risky behavior has declined somewhat in recent years. But the statistics on alcohol use are still alarming, and mean that many U.S. teenagers are regularly in an impaired state that can make them more vulnerable to taking risks or being violent. The CDC survey also documents other risky teenage behavior often linked with violent death. Homicides are likely to involve weapons, and 60% of suicides (especially among boys) involve guns.<sup>4</sup> The 2007 survey found that about 6% of U.S. teens had carried weapons like guns or knives to school in the previous month. In the year before the survey, 8% had been threatened or injured with weapons at school, and 12% had been in fights at school.<sup>5</sup>

The CDC survey is also an important source of data about teenagers who are contemplating suicide. Fortunately, suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts have been decreasing among U.S. teens over the past 5 to 10 years. But the statistics are still disturbing. In 2007, one in seven of the high school students surveyed had seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months, and one in nine had made suicide plans. One in 14 of the teens surveyed nationwide reported attempting suicide in the previous year, and 2% required medical treatment for injuries, drug overdoses, or poisoning that resulted from suicide attempts.<sup>6</sup>

Research shows that teenagers considering suicide often provide clues. While drug and alcohol use can be common predictors, there are also more subtle signs. For instance, withdrawing from friends, changing sleeping or eating habits, failing to pay attention to appearance, or trouble concentrating can be danger signals among teenagers.<sup>7</sup>

## U.S. AND ALASKA TEEN DEATH RATES

As the trend graph shows, the teen death rate in Alaska is higher and more variable than the U.S. rate. In 2005, 48 Alaska teenagers died, translating into a rate of 83 per 100,000 teens 15 to 19. That compares with a U.S. average of 65 per 100,000. Alaska ranked 36th in the U.S. on this indicator in 2005.

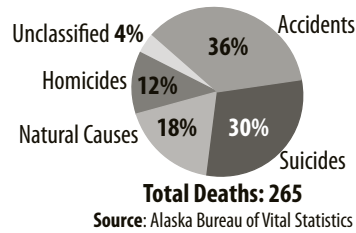
Still, Alaska's 2005 rate was a 42% improvement from the 2000 rate of 142 per 100,000. But as we've seen with other indicators, the teen death rate in Alaska fluctuates significantly from year to year because it is based on small numbers of actual deaths. And as with other indicators, we deal with that annual fluctuation by reporting 5-year averages for types of death and regions.

## MANNER OF DEATH

From 2002 through 2006, 265 teenagers (ages 15 to 19) died in Alaska. The pie chart on the facing page shows that of those deaths, 36% were accidents, 30% were suicides, 18% were from natural causes, and 12% were homicides.



**Causes of Teen Death in Alaska, 2002-2006**



**Teen Death Rates, by Manner and Region**

(Rate per 100,000 Teens 15-19, 5-Year Average, 2002-2006)

Region	Accident	Homicide	Suicide	Natural
Anchorage	25.9	14.8	13.9	15.8
Interior	27.0	17.2	29.5	9.8
Remainder of State	46.6	6.5	43.3	21.2
<b>Alaska</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>17.3</b>

Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

The table above shows that teenage suicide is far less common in Anchorage than in the rest of the state. Homicide rates, however, are higher in Anchorage and the Interior region, while rates of accidental death are much higher in the rest of the state.

**OVERALL TEEN DEATHS**

The bar graph shows the average teen death rate by regions of Alaska between 2002 and 2006. During that time, 265 teenagers died, for a rate of 98 per 100,000 teens ages 15-19. The overall death rates in two regions were approximately three times higher than the state average of 98—the Southwest rate (294 per 100,000) and the Northern rate (283 per 100,000). The teen death rate was lowest in the Gulf Coast (62 per 100,000), followed by the Mat-Su (69), Anchorage (72), Southeast (82), and Interior (84).

**VIOLENT TEEN DEATH**

A similar regional pattern holds for teen deaths due to violence (accidents, suicides, and homicides). Between 2002 and 2006, the average violent death rate among Alaskans 15 to 19 was 76 per 100,000. But rates of violent death were far higher in the Southwest (248 per 100,000) and Northern (235) regions. Rates in those two regions were approximately five times those in the remaining areas of the state—Gulf-Coast (47 per 100,000), Mat-Su (50), Southeast (50), and Anchorage (55).

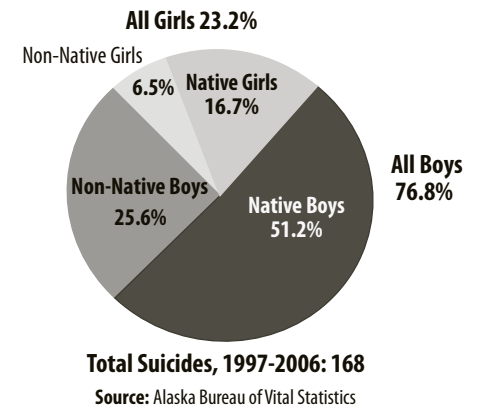
**TEEN SUICIDE**

Between 1997 and 2006, 168 Alaska teenagers committed suicide. As the adjacent pie chart shows, 51% of the teenagers who killed themselves in Alaska between 1997 and 2006 were Alaska Native boys, followed by non-Native boys (26%), Alaska Native girls (17%), and non-Native girls (6%).

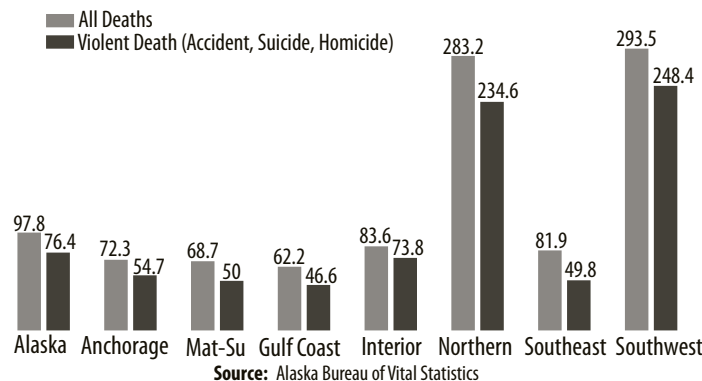
The suicide rate among Alaska boys (48 per 100,000) was three times higher than the rate among girls (16 per 100,000) over the past decade. We don't have current rates by race, but given that Alaska Native teenagers account for less than a quarter of all the teenagers in Alaska, it's clear from the pie chart that Alaska Native boys are by far the likeliest to kill themselves.

There are also significant disparities in the teen suicide rate in various regions of the state—but the regions where the rate is highest are also those where a big share of the teenagers are Alaska Native. The average suicide rate in Alaska between 1997 and 2006 was 33 per 100,000 teens ages 15-19. In the Northern region, the rate was nearly six times higher (190 per 100,000 teens), followed by the rate in Southwest Alaska, which was five times the state average (130). Teenagers were least likely to commit suicide in the Gulf Coast and Southeast regions, where the rate was about 11 per 100,000 teens.

**Teen (15-19) Suicides by Sex and Race, 1997-2006**

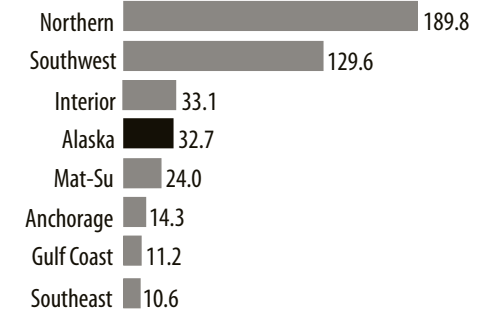


**Teen Death Rate and Violent Death Rate, by Region**  
(Rate per 100,000 Teens 15-19, 5-Year Average, 2002-2006)



**Alaska Teen Suicide Rate by Region**

(Rate per 100,000 Teens 15-19, 1997-2006)



Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

# Child Abuse and Neglect

## DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Every 10 seconds, there's a report of child abuse in this country—and experts believe only a fraction of abuse or neglect actually gets reported.<sup>1</sup> The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines child maltreatment to include neglect and three types of abuse.<sup>2</sup> Neglect exists when a parent or other adult responsible for providing care fails to meet a child's fundamental needs for shelter, food, health care, schooling, and clothing. Child abuse can be (1) physical, (2) mental or emotional, or (3) sexual.

In 2006, approximately 905,000 American children were the victims of child abuse or neglect, for a rate of 12.1 per 1,000 U.S. children. More than 1,500 died that year from abuse or neglect.<sup>3</sup> There are substantial differences in rates of abuse among children of different ages and races. Children age four or younger are most likely to die or suffer serious injuries from abuse or neglect.<sup>4</sup> Black children are abused at almost double the rate among White children (19.8 per 1,000, compared with 10.7 in 2006). The rates among American Indian (15.9) and Alaska Native (15.4) children were about 1.5 times the rate among White children in 2006.<sup>5</sup>

Children who survive abuse suffer from cuts, burns, and broken bones, as well as disruptions and damage to their brains and nervous and immune systems.<sup>6</sup> As they age, they are at significantly increased risk of psychiatric disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections. They are also more likely to be arrested, commit violent crimes, and end up in prison.<sup>7</sup>

## DATA

Here we report data on child abuse and neglect in Alaska, collected by the Office of Children's Services (OCS) in the Department of Health and Social Services—the agency that receives and investigates reports of child abuse or neglect. Any adult who suspects a child has been neglected or harmed can file a report with OCS. Then, OCS uses a screening process to evaluate whether an allegation of harm or neglect should be investigated, based on

the information provided in the allegation and an assessment of the degree of potential risk to the child.

Allegations that are “screened in” are assigned for investigation, and allegations that are “screened out” are not further investigated. Allegations assigned for investigation are put into one of four categories: mental injury, sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect. Following an investigation, OCS determines whether an allegation of neglect or abuse has been substantiated.

The Office of Children's Services received 25,834 allegations of child abuse or neglect during its 2008 reporting period, which is the federal fiscal year (October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2008). Of the allegations received that year, 59% (15,280) were assigned for investigation, and 41% (10,554) were screened out. Reports can be screened out for various reasons—for example, some are referred to law-enforcement jurisdiction, some are multiple reports of the same incident, and some have insufficient information.

About 66% of the allegations that were assigned for investigation in 2008 were for neglect, followed by mental injury (15%), physical abuse (14%), and sexual abuse (5%).

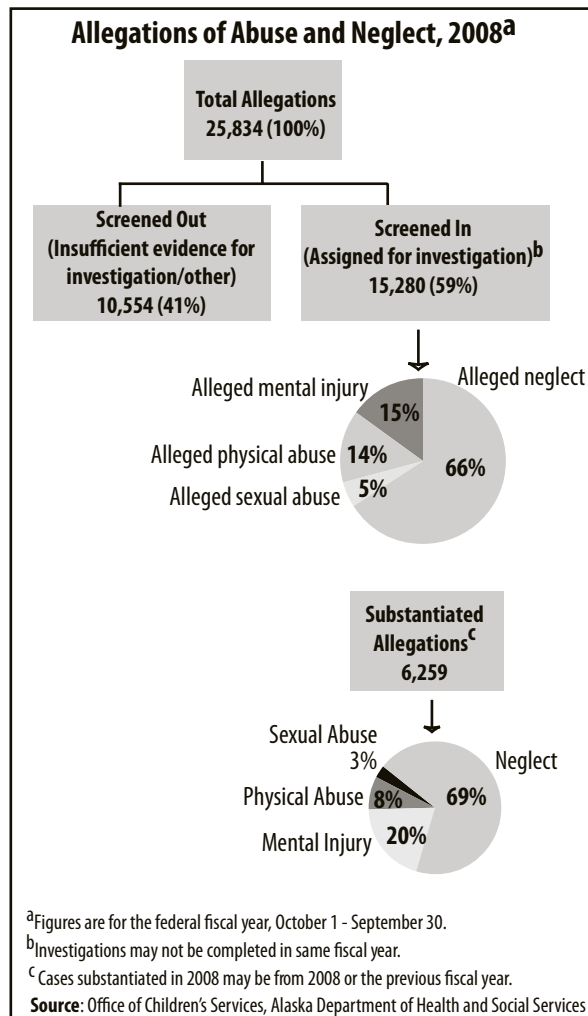
Of the 6,259 allegations that OCS found were substantiated in 2008, most (69%) were for neglect. Mental injury made up 20% of the substantiated cases, physical abuse 8%, and sexual abuse 3%.

The table on the facing page shows the number of individual victims of substantiated abuse in Alaska, by type of abuse and race in 2008. Some children are the victims of more than one type of maltreatment—so the number of individual victims is smaller than the number of substantiated cases of child abuse.

More than half the children (53%) who were abused or neglected in Alaska in 2008 were Alaska Native, about 25% were White, and 8% were of other races. Race was not reported for the remaining 14%. (Children can be coded under more than one race in the OCS database. In the table, the Alaska Native category includes children who are Alaska Native or Alaska Native and some other race.)

## RATES OF ABUSE, ALASKA AND U.S.

This year we're also able to compare rates of child abuse and neglect in Alaska and the rest of the U.S. The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System compiles data annually from child protective service agencies across the nation.<sup>8</sup> Those agencies submit case-level data on child abuse and neglect to the national data system. Data in the national system for 2006 represents 99% of all American children 17 and under—about 74 million children.



**Victims of Substantiated Abuse, by Race and Type of Harm, 2008<sup>a</sup>**

(Children Under Age 18)

	Mental Injury	Neglect	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Total	Percent
Alaska Native <sup>b</sup>	496	1,638	185	73	2,001	53%
White	218	665	146	62	957	25%
Other Races	41	211	68	5	304	8%
Not reported	198	272	97	38	525	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>953</b>	<b>2,786</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>3,787</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>a</sup>Each victim is counted once per type of harm substantiated.

<sup>b</sup>Includes children who are either Alaska Native alone or Alaska Native and some other race.

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

The review committee examines a wide range of information from multiple sources—including autopsy reports, medical records, and socioeconomic data. An examination of the death certificates of infants who died in Alaska between 1992 and 2002 identified 18 deaths related to child abuse. But the broader MIMR assessment—looking at more data sources—identified 114 such infant deaths over the decade.

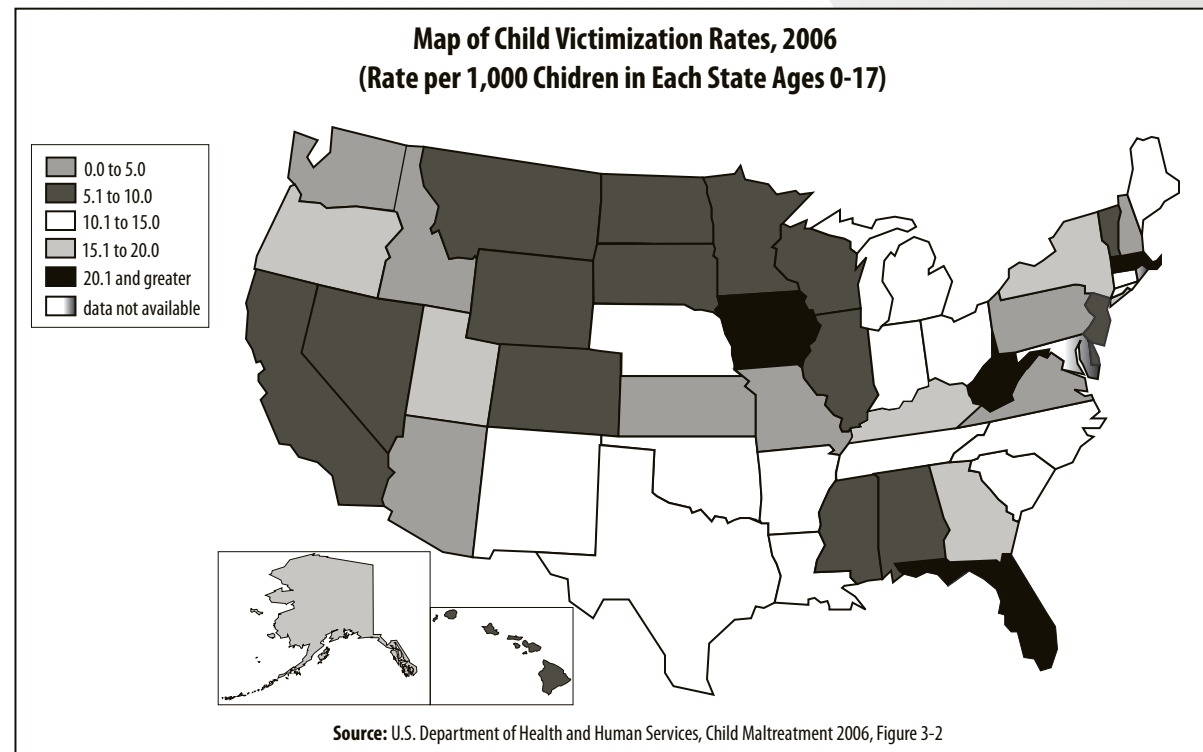
Knowing the scope of child abuse in the state, as well as having more information about the circumstances when it occurs, would allow state agencies to better focus their efforts to prevent and reduce child abuse. Right now SCAN is concentrating on mortality data, but will soon expand to examine morbidity data.

Alaska's rate of child abuse and neglect in 2006 was 19 per 1,000 children—among the highest in the nation, as the map shows. The national average rate was 12.1 per 1,000. Five states and the District of Columbia had rates higher than Alaska's. Pennsylvania had the lowest rate, at 1.5. per 1,000 children. These figures are based on the number of children state protective service agencies confirmed had been abused or neglected.

**THE SCAN PROGRAM**

As bad as the confirmed rates of abuse are, they don't reflect the actual extent of child abuse. We noted earlier that experts believe much of the child abuse nationwide goes unreported. In Alaska, an effort is underway to learn more about the extent of abuse and neglect. The Alaska Surveillance of Child Abuse and Neglect Program (SCAN) will be the repository for morbidity and mortality data and will also coordinate data collection with other agencies—with the goal of better identifying and helping Alaska children who are abused.<sup>9</sup>

An example of how broader data could help identify child abuse is in the work of the Maternal-Infant Mortality Review (MIMR), a longstanding effort in Alaska to more accurately determine the causes of maternal and infant deaths. We discussed that work in our 2005 data book.



## CHILD INJURIES

In this indicator we look at serious injuries among Alaska's children through age 19. By "serious" we mean an injury that requires hospitalization for 24 hours or more. Injuries include both accidental and intentional. Hospitalizations resulting from illness are excluded. All data in this section are from the Alaska Trauma Registry, which collects information from Alaska's 24 acute-care hospitals.<sup>1</sup>

For quite some time, the top three causes of hospitalization for serious injuries among Alaska's children have been falls, motor vehicle crashes, and suicide attempts. Falls are consistently the leading cause—in the entire U.S. as well as in Alaska—while suicide attempts and motor vehicle traffic accidents fluctuate as the second and third leading causes in Alaska.

The inset in the adjacent map shows that for the period from 2002 to 2006, falls accounted for 25% of all serious injuries among Alaska children. Motor vehicle crashes were second, causing 15% of injuries, and suicide attempts were a close third, causing 14% of injuries.

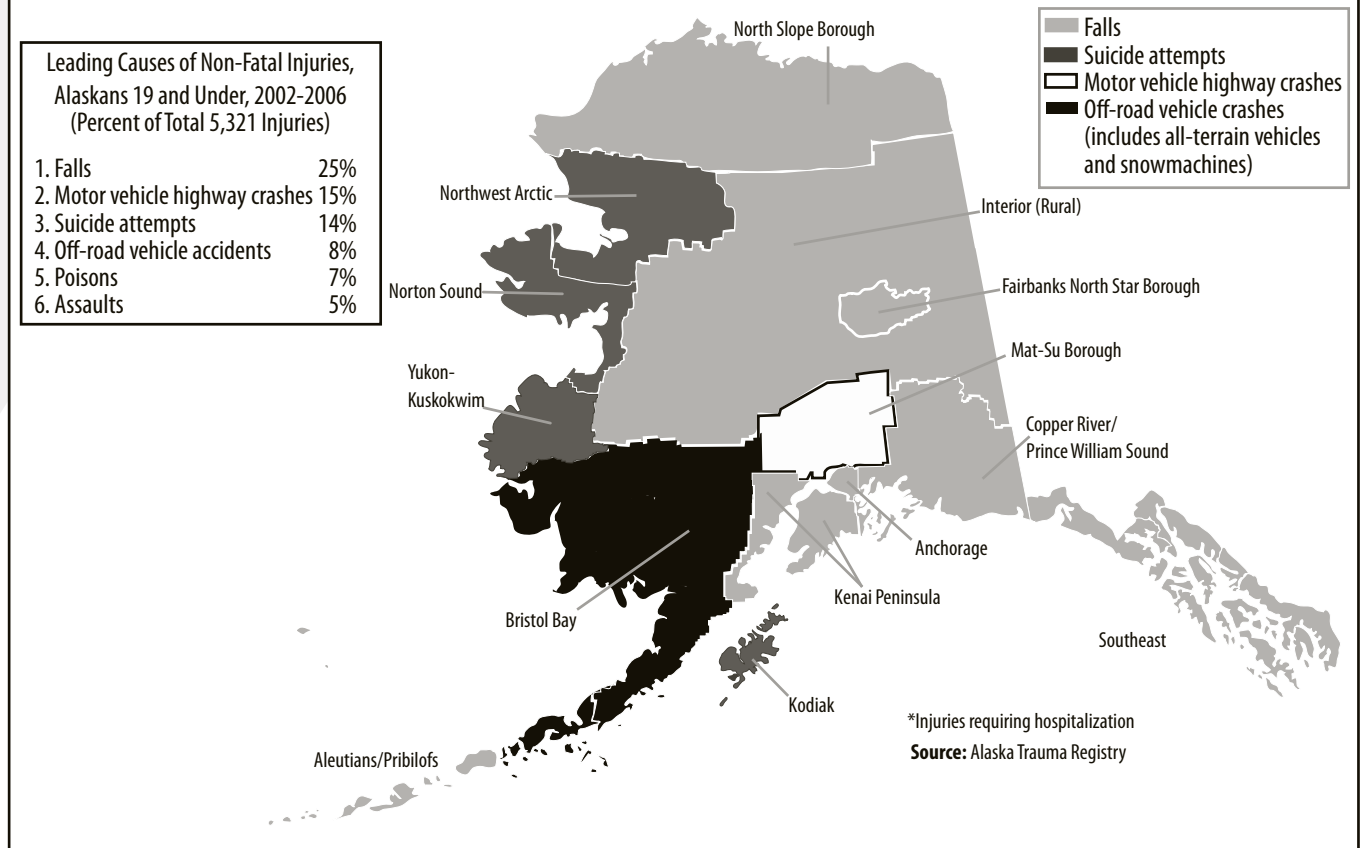
The most common type of injury varies considerably by the age of the child. Suicide attempts sent the largest number of teens ages 15 through 19 to the hospital from 2002 to 2006, followed by motor vehicle crashes. Falls were the leading cause of hospitalizations of children under 15, with motor vehicle crashes second. All the children who were hospitalized for injuries from suffocation and burns were under age 5.

The most common causes of injury among Alaska's children also vary considerably around the state. The map shows the pattern for the period 2002 to 2006. Falls caused more serious injuries than anything else in Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula, and most of the northern, interior, and southeastern parts of the state. In western Alaska—the Northwest Arctic, Norton Sound, and Yukon-Kuskokwim regions—suicide attempts injured more chil-

Leading Causes of Non-Fatal Injuries, Alaskans 19 and Under, 2002-2006 (Percent of Total 5,321 Injuries)

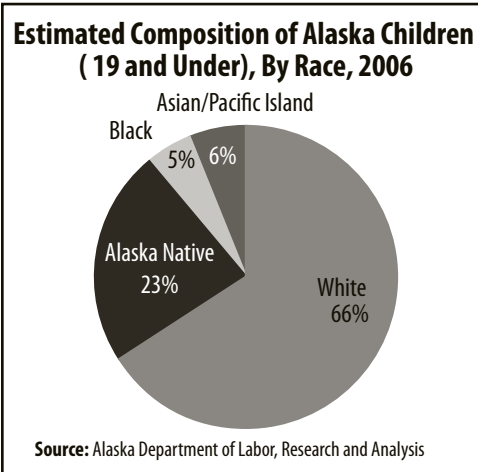
1. Falls	25%
2. Motor vehicle highway crashes	15%
3. Suicide attempts	14%
4. Off-road vehicle accidents	8%
5. Poisons	7%
6. Assaults	5%

Leading Causes of Non-Fatal Injuries,\* Alaskans 19 and Under, by Region of Residence, 2002-2006



dren and teenagers than any other single cause. In the Mat-Su, motor vehicle crashes sent the most children to the hospital, and in the Bristol Bay region crashes with off-road vehicles were the leading cause of serious injury among children.

And finally, the frequency and type of serious injury also vary among Alaska children of different races. Keep in mind that roughly 66% of Alaska children are White, 23% are Alaska Native, and the remaining 11% are of other races. The bar chart on the next page shows hospital admissions, by race, for the most frequent causes of injury.

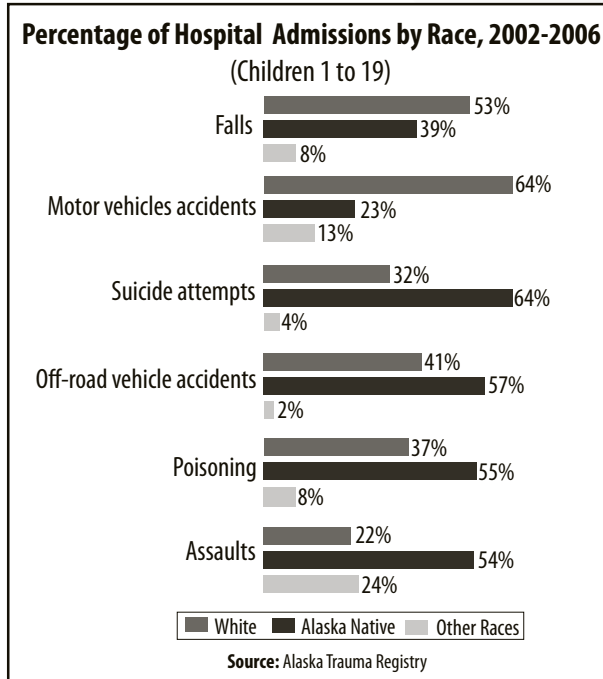


During the period 2002 through 2006, Alaska Native children—who make up about 23% of children in Alaska—accounted for disproportionately high percentages of those hospitalized for almost all causes. About 54% of those hospitalized for assaults, 64% for suicide attempts, 57% for off-road accidents, and 55% for poisoning were Alaska Native children.

Children of other minorities—who make up about 11% of Alaska’s children—accounted for relatively small shares of those hospitalized for most causes. But they made up 24% of those hospitalized because of assaults and 13% of those injured in vehicle crashes. White children made up the largest shares of those hospitalized because of falls (53%) and motor vehicle crashes (64%).

Some differences in injuries by race and region reflect differences in lifestyle around the state. For example, off-road vehicles are a much more common mode of transportation in rural communities, where many Alaska Native children and teenagers live. And motor vehicles and traffic are concentrated in Anchorage and other areas on the road system, where more White children live.

But we also know, as discussed in the earlier section on deaths among teenagers, that Alaska Native teenagers are more likely to commit suicide. These figures show that they also make many attempts that don’t kill them but do cause serious injuries.



### KIDS DON’T FLOAT

In 1996 a group in Homer, Alaska, started a program—Kids Don’t Float—that has since saved a number of children in Alaska and other states from drowning. The group established 15 life-jacket loaner stations around Katchemak Bay. Boaters without their own life jackets for children could borrow jackets, at no cost, from loaner stations and return them after use. Several observational surveys in Alaska have documented increased use of life jackets among children in areas with loaner stations.<sup>2</sup>

Kids Don’t Float is now sponsored by federal and state agencies and local groups in communities around Alaska and 11 other states.<sup>3</sup> The program also offers an educational curriculum on boating and water safety for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The curriculum contains short lessons and activities, including the proper use of life jackets; it also trains high-school students to teach the curriculum to younger children.<sup>4</sup>

To learn more, go to: [dnr.alaska.gov/parks/boating/kdfhome.htm](http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/boating/kdfhome.htm).



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## ENDNOTES FOR TEEN DEATH RATE

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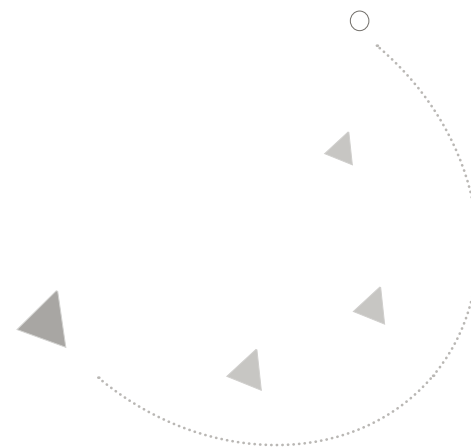
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*Juvenile Justice*





**BACKGROUND**

In the early 1990s juvenile crime in the U.S. climbed dramatically. In some cases, it doubled or tripled from what it had been 10 years earlier. That increase led to widespread media coverage and kindled public fear. Some experts made predictions about “juvenile superpredators.” Public policies were adopted that made juveniles committing certain crimes more likely to be tried in adult courts and required minimum periods of incarceration for certain crimes.<sup>1</sup>

But by 1996 juvenile crime began to decline. There’s no consensus about why crime rose and then fell, but analysts say changes in “drug markets, policing practices, incarceration rates, age composition of the population, availability of handguns, and the economy” all likely contributed in some way.<sup>2</sup>

We now understand more about how children and teenagers think. Brain-imaging has shown that the adolescent brain is still developing in impulse control and planning ahead, and that the process is generally not complete until people are in their mid-20s.<sup>3</sup>

Recent research has focused on identifying prevention programs. Some have been found effective, while others are still being examined. These programs are of different types—preventing crimes, community-based interventions, and programs for juveniles already in institutions. Alaska has offered Aggression Replacement Training (discussed on page 56) in institutions since 2004 and more recently has also offered it in communities.

**STATE CRIME DATA**

The Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice has three goals: holding offenders accountable, promoting restoration of victims, and preventing repeat criminal behavior.

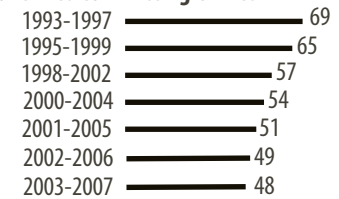
The division reports its progress toward these goals annually. The 2008 Juvenile Justice Report Card shows that in fiscal year 2007, juvenile offenders completed about 81% of the community work service they were ordered to do, and they paid victims 90% of the financial restitution they were ordered to pay. Progress in preventing repeat criminal behavior is measured through recidivism rates for two groups—for juveniles released from secure juvenile facilities and for those released from formal probation. Recidivism is defined as “new offenses that occur within 12 months of release that result in a new juvenile adjudication or adult conviction.” For juveniles released from secure facilities in fiscal year 2005 the recidivism rate was 34% and for those released from probation 29%.<sup>4</sup>

The adjacent figure shows that the rates of juveniles committing crimes and the total reports of crime have declined substantially since the 1990s. Each bar shows a five-year average; the data are averaged to smooth out the year-to-year fluctuations that can happen in a small population like Alaska’s. Since the 1993-1997 period, the rate of individual juveniles committing crimes has decreased by about 30%, and the rate of crimes reported has dropped by 35%.

**Juvenile Crime in Alaska, 1993-1997 to 2003-2007**

(Referral Rates per 1,000 Juveniles 10-17, 5-Year Averages)

**Individual Juveniles Committing Crimes**



**Total Reports of Juvenile Crime**



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

The table below shows the annual average number and percent of referrals by region for various types of juvenile crime in Alaska during the 2003-2007 period. About half the referrals were for property crimes, 20% were for crimes against persons, and

**Juvenile (Ages 10-17) Delinquency Referrals<sup>a</sup> by Region and Type of Crime**

(Annual Average, Fiscal Years 2003-2007<sup>b</sup>)

Region	Crimes Against Persons		Crimes Against Property		Drug/Alcohol Laws		Other <sup>c</sup>		Total <sup>d</sup>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Anchorage	411	17.4%	1,193	50.5%	173	7.3%	586	24.8%	2,362	100%
Mat-Su	93	17.5%	255	47.9%	72	13.5%	113	21.2%	532	100%
Gulf Coast	135	17.5%	344	44.5%	112	14.6%	181	23.4%	772	100%
Interior	129	19.0%	281	41.4%	101	14.9%	168	24.7%	679	100%
Northern	104	21.1%	257	52.0%	35	7.2%	98	19.8%	495	100%
Southeast	138	16.9%	338	41.3%	99	12.1%	242	29.6%	818	100%
Southwest	152	27.6%	264	48.0%	46	8.4%	88	16.0%	550	100%
Alaska	1,162	18.7%	2,932	47.2%	639	10.3%	1,475	23.8%	6,408	100%

<sup>a</sup>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.

<sup>b</sup>The state fiscal year is from July 1 through June 30. <sup>c</sup>Includes probation violations, violations of public order and weapons laws, and miscellaneous other offenses. <sup>d</sup>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

10% were violations of drug or alcohol laws.

The first table on this page shows all Alaskans ages 10-19 by race and region. The second table shows Alaskans 10-17 referred to the juvenile justice system between 2003 and 2007, also by race and region. The age and race groupings vary somewhat in the two tables, because the Alaska Department of Labor and the Division of Juvenile Justice report age and race somewhat differently.

But even without being able to make precise comparisons, we can see evidence of disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system. For example, Alaska Natives make up 22% of all Alaskans 10 through 19, yet they account for 30% of the referrals statewide. Also, while 7.7% of Anchorage residents ages 10 to 19 are Black, Black teenagers make up 12.3% of those referred to the juvenile justice system in Anchorage.

## Alaska Population, Ages 10-19, by Race and Region, 2006

Region	Alaska Native <sup>a</sup>	Black	White	Asian / Pacific Isl.
Anchorage	11.5%	7.7%	71.5%	9.3%
Mat-Su	11.1%	2.2%	84.1%	2.6%
Gulf Coast	13.3%	1.1%	79.5%	6.1%
Interior	16.3%	6.1%	74.7%	3.0%
Northern	86.3%	0.5%	11.3%	1.9%
Southeast	24.2%	1.0%	69.3%	5.5%
Southwest	84.5%	0.9%	12.9%	1.7%
<b>Alaska</b>	22.0%	4.6%	67.5%	5.9%

<sup>a</sup>Also includes American Indians, who make up 0.5% of Alaska's population.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis, Demographic Unit

## FEDERAL CRIME DATA

The figures on the facing page are federal data for Alaskans ages 10-17. The figures aren't directly comparable to state figures. Federal figures are for single years, while the state's are averages over five years. Federal figures also categorize crime somewhat differently. For example, federal figures separate major property crimes from vandalism, but the state has a single category for all property crimes. Despite differences, both sources show declining juvenile crime in Alaska and nationwide.

The large bar chart compares juvenile arrest rates in Alaska and nationwide in 1994 and 2006. The figures are based on total crimes—which means they're higher than rates of crime among individual juveniles, because some juveniles commit more than one crime.

Rates for all types of crime were lower in the state and across the nation in 2006 than they were in 1994, except that nationwide arrests for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs were higher.

Alaska's overall juvenile crime rate in 2006 was about 20% below the U.S. average. In 1994 it had been slightly above the national average, because the rate of juvenile arrests for property crimes was so much higher in Alaska. By 2006, juvenile property crime in Alaska was still more common than it was nationwide, but the rate had dropped 60%.

The rate of juvenile arrests for violent crime in Alaska was significantly below the U.S. average in both 1994 and 2006.

The trend in juvenile crime has been down since the mid-1990s, but not all types of crime dropped every year. The rate of property crimes in Alaska increased slightly between 2005 and 2006. Violent crime among juveniles in Alaska increased from 201

## Total Juveniles (10-17) Referred to Juvenile Justice System, by Race and Region, Fiscal Years 2003 - 2007<sup>a</sup>

Region	Alaska Native	Black	White	NH/ Pacific Isl.	Asian	More Than One Race	Other	Unknown
Anchorage	16.4%	12.3%	43.9%	3.7%	6.8%	11.0%	3.3%	2.8%
Mat-Su	9.2%	1.7%	82.2%	0.2%	1.4%	3.9%	0.4%	1.0%
Gulf Coast	11.0%	1.5%	70.9%	0.6%	4.2%	7.4%	0.7%	3.7%
Interior	31.2%	8.7%	53.7%	0.3%	0.5%	3.6%	0.8%	1.4%
Northern	89.4%	0.4%	1.7%	0.2%	0.1%	5.4%	0.6%	2.2%
Southeast	35.4%	1.9%	50.4%	1.1%	0.7%	6.1%	0.7%	3.6%
Southwest	91.9%	0.1%	4.3%	0.2%	0.1%	2.4%	0.1%	1.1%
<b>Alaska</b>	30.1%	6.5%	46.5%	1.8%	3.5%	7.4%	1.7%	2.5%

<sup>a</sup>This is an unduplicated count of all individual juveniles referred to Alaska's juvenile justice system from 2003 through 2007. Race is reported by the juvenile.

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

per 100,000 teenagers in 2004 to 237 in 2005, but then declined again in 2006, to 213. Nationally, the rate of violent juvenile crime increased in recent years, from 271 per 100,000 teenagers in 2004 to 283 in 2005 and 300 in 2006.

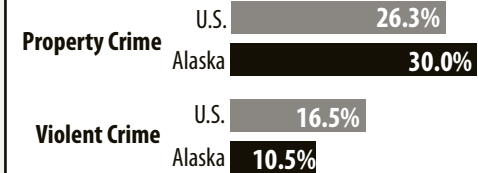
The pie chart adjacent to the bars shows how different types of crime contributed to the total juvenile arrest rate in Alaska in 2006. Again, the figures are based on the total number of crimes, rather than the rate of individual teenagers committing crimes.

The total arrest rate of 5,250 per 100,000 Alaska teenagers in 2006 was a decrease from the 2005 rate of 5,362. Major property

crimes were the most common, accounting for 31%, followed by abuses of drug and alcohol laws at 16% and assaults at 10%. Violent crimes accounted for about 4% of the total.

The small bar chart shows a different way of looking at juvenile crime: the share of all property and violent crimes—among both adults and teenagers—committed by teenagers. In 2006, about 26% of property crimes and 10.5% of violent crimes in Alaska were committed by teens. In the U.S. as a whole, teenagers committed about 30% of property crime and 16.5% of violent crime. Alaska teenagers continue to commit a larger share of property crimes

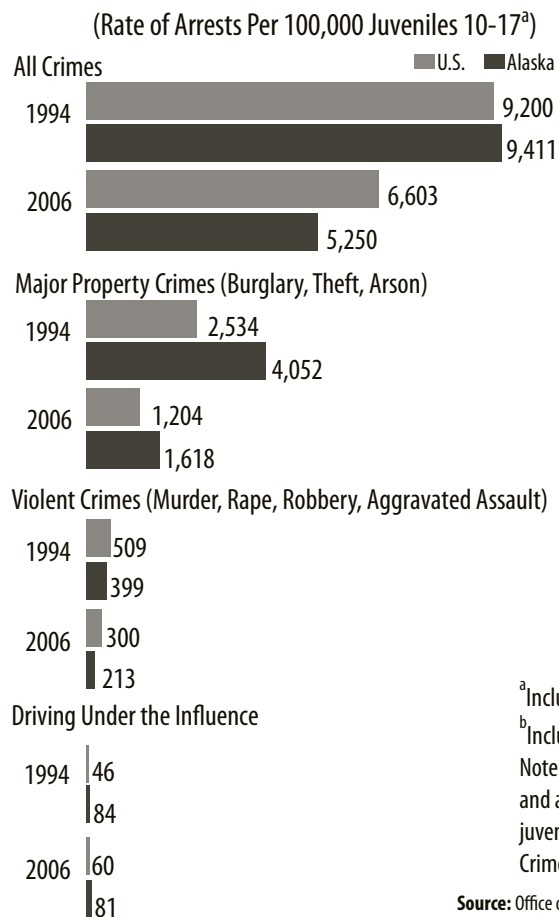
**How Much of Total Crime (Adult and Juvenile) Do Juveniles Commit? (2006)**



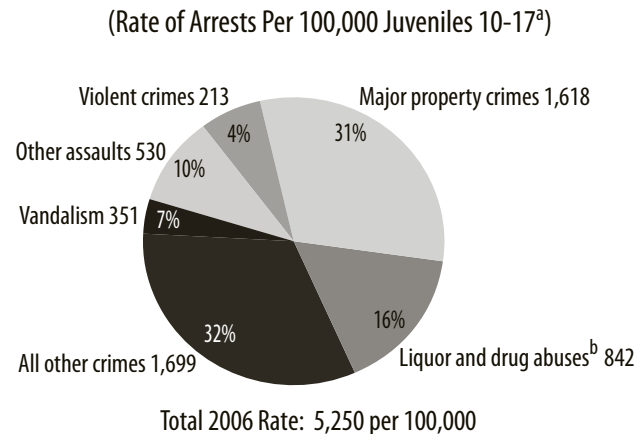
Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/ezaucr/asp/ucr\\_display.asp](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/ezaucr/asp/ucr_display.asp)

and a smaller share of violent crimes than teenagers nationwide.

**FBI Estimates of Juvenile Arrest Rate, U.S. and Alaska, 1994 and 2006**



**Breakdown of Alaska Juvenile Arrest Rate, 2006**



<sup>a</sup>Includes multiple arrests of same juvenile.

<sup>b</sup>Includes driving under the influence of alcohol and violations of drug and alcohol laws.

Note: These federal figures on arrest rates differ somewhat from state juvenile referral reports and are for single years. We report state data in five-year averages; because the number of juveniles in Alaska is relatively small, figures are more subject to year-to-year variations. Crimes included in various categories also differ in state and federal figures.

Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2009. <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/ezaucr/>

Yet another way of measuring juvenile crime is the proportion of juveniles who are in residential placement facilities. The federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention does an annual count, on the same day, of all juveniles in residential placement across the country. This count gives a point-in-time number for juveniles who have been placed in some type of facility by court order.

On February 22, 2006, 363 teenagers were confined to residential facilities in Alaska and 92,854 were confined nationwide.<sup>5</sup>

Alaska's rate of confinement was 430 per 100,000 teens ages 10 through 17. For White teens in Alaska the rate was 257 per 100,000 and for Alaska Native teens 841. Vermont had the lowest rate in the nation, at 81 per 100,000. Only South Dakota (672), the District of Columbia (671), and Wyoming (559) had rates higher than Alaska's.<sup>6</sup>

## PROGRAMS FOR JUVENILE OFFENDERS

### Aggression Replacement Therapy

Responding to the wave of juvenile crime in the mid-1990s, Americans began looking for more effective ways to reduce juvenile crime. In Alaska and nationwide, there has been increasing focus on what are referred to as “evidence-based programs.” These are programs researchers have evaluated and have found statistical evidence of their effectiveness.

Alaska’s Division of Juvenile Justice has looked at evidence-based programs to determine ones that best fit Alaska’s needs, and it has implemented Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART). That program identifies risks that could be reduced by helping teenagers control anger, develop behavioral and social skills, and enhance their moral reasoning processes. The division has been using ART in juvenile justice facilities since June 2004 and has expanded its use, in locations around the state and in numbers of teenagers participating. In state fiscal year 2008, 198 teenagers in juvenile facilities participated in ART.<sup>7</sup> The division is also now providing the program to teenagers who are not in juvenile facilities.

### ANCHORAGE YOUTH COURT

In 2009, Alaska is marking its 50th year of statehood, and the Anchorage Youth Court—the largest and most active youth court in the state—is celebrating its 20th year. It was founded in 1989 by a group of Alaska Bar Association lawyers working with teenage volunteers. It was the first youth court in Alaska and is a model for the 12 other Alaska youth courts that have been established since then.

It is a non-profit organization operating in partnership with the Alaska Department of Health and Human Services and the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice. Like other youth courts, it is an alternative to the traditional juvenile court system. It accepts about 300 to 400 referrals a year from the juvenile court system, and over the last 20 years has processed over 5,200 cases.<sup>8</sup>

Trained teenage volunteers hear cases and determine sentences. The Anchorage court takes cases involving those between the ages of 7 and 18, most of whom are first-time offenders who have committed minor property crimes or other misdemeanors.

The Anchorage Youth Court is nationally recognized for its community collaboration and the extensive legal education it provides teenage volunteers. To be admitted to the youth court program, teenagers must complete an eight-week Anchorage Youth Bar Association training program and pass a youth bar exam. Participants then volunteer to work as clerks, bailiffs, attorneys, and judges. In 2008, the Anchorage court trained over 309 students in grades 7 through 12. These students then volunteered over 7,000 hours of their time processing juvenile cases.<sup>9</sup>

The Anchorage Youth Court has maintained a 10.1% long-term recidivism rate among all those who came before the court from 1996 to the present. Since 1996, juveniles sentenced by the court have worked over 107,000 community service hours and earned over \$85,000 to repay communities and partially compensate victims.<sup>10</sup>

Sharon Leon, the executive director of the Anchorage Youth Court, has led the organization from the beginning in 1989. Over the years the Anchorage Youth Court has won several major awards, and a 2002 report by the Urban Institute named it one of the four best youth courts in the nation.<sup>11</sup>

### OTHER YOUTH COURT NEWS

United Youth Courts of Alaska is a non-profit organization founded in 1998. It works to increase awareness of youth court programs, address community concerns about juvenile crime, and help communities interested in establishing youth courts.<sup>12</sup> It also provides technical assistance, training materials, and legal education to its 12 member organizations, in Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai-Homer, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Mat-Su, Nome, Sitka, Valdez, and Wrangell.<sup>13</sup> The executive director is Tom Torvie.

In November 2009 United Youth Courts will hold its annual conference at the Challenger Science Center in Kenai, Alaska. The conference is expected to draw about 100 participants. Besides sharing ideas and learning new youth court skills, attendees will have the opportunity to take part in interactive space science activities offered at the new Challenger Science complex.<sup>14</sup>

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