



Bulletin No. 39
November 10, 1997
Diabetes in Alaska

Diabetes is a serious, common and costly public health problem. Approximately 14,700 Alaskan adults have been diagnosed with diabetes, comprising 3.0% of the adult population.¹ Among women, 4.1% have diabetes and among men, 3.0%. Diabetes disproportionately affects the elderly and minority populations. Among adults age 65 and over, 3600 have diabetes, comprising 13.4% of that population. In minority populations, the highest prevalence is found among Hispanic people.

Table 1: Diabetes Prevalence in Alaska by Race/Ethnicity

Race/ethnicity	Adult Prevalence ¹
Hispanic	5.0%
Alaska Native	3.5%
White	3.4%
African American	2.7%
Asian/Pacific Is.	0.6%
Alaska BRFSS, 1991-1994	

Diabetes Prevalence in Alaska Natives

The prevalence of diabetes in Alaska Native populations has increased over the past decade; the lowest rates are found among the Eskimos.²

Table 2: Diabetes Prevalence among Alaska Natives²

Alaska Native Group	Diabetes Prevalence per 1000	
	1985	1993
All Alaska Natives	15.7	19.2
Eskimos	8.8	12.1
Indian	22.0	24.3
Aleut	27.2	32.6

Geographic Distribution of Diabetes

The overall prevalence of diabetes does not vary widely by geographic region in Alaska.

Table 3: Diabetes Prevalence and Mortality in Alaska by Region.

Region of Alaska	Adult Prevalence*		Diabetes Mortality** 1986-94	
	Alaska Native	Non-Native	Alaska Native	Non-Native
Urban	6%	4%	14.7	13.1
Gulf Coast	3%	3%	15.5	8.8
Southeast	5%	4%	17.1	10.4
Bush	3%	2%	7.1	8.5
* 1991-1994 BRFSS data; crude prevalence rates per 100 ** Age-adjusted to US 1940 population, rate per 100,000				

Diabetes Mortality

In 1995, diabetes was the underlying cause of death for 54 Alaska residents, and diabetes was listed as any cause of death for 152 residents. The mortality rate from diabetes in Alaska has been increasing over the past decade (Figure 1). Diabetes is the tenth leading cause of death in Alaska, and the seventh leading cause by disease (1995).³

Diabetes in Pregnancy

From 1990 through 1994, there were 1473 births to Alaska women with gestational diabetes and 132 births to women with pre-existing diabetes. Based on birth certificate data there was not an increase in perinatal or maternal adverse outcomes among women with either gestational or pre-existing diabetes.

Diabetes Morbidity

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that among Alaskans with diabetes, there are annually 70 lower extremity amputations, 17 new cases of end-stage renal disease, 20-60 new cases of blindness, 3980 hospitalizations, and 1074 hospitalizations due to cardiovascular disease.⁴

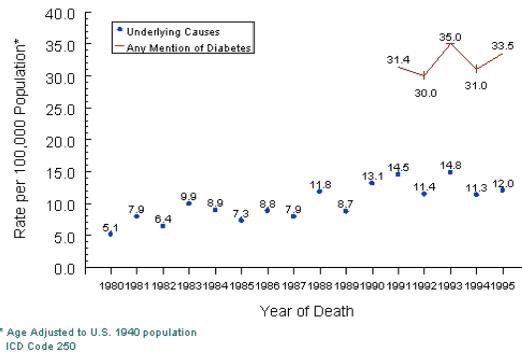
Risk Factors/Health Practices Among People With Diabetes

Among adults with diabetes, 49% are overweight, 24% are current smokers, 54% have been told their blood pressure is high, and 62% report a sedentary lifestyle.¹ Preliminary data from the 1995 BRFSS (n=43) shows the following: 91% have seen a health care provider in the past year for diabetes; of these, 65% had a foot exam; 54% had dilated eye exams, and 30% had a hemoglobin A1c measurement. Among people with diabetes, 58% check their blood glucose at least once a day, and 15% never check their blood glucose.

Summary

As the population of Alaska ages, diabetes will become more prevalent. Furthermore, the prevalence of diabetes is increasing among Alaska Native people. Much of the burden of diabetes could be prevented through early detection, improved delivery of care and diabetes self-management. Alaskans with diabetes could improve their health by decreasing smoking, increasing exercise, and increasing their use of diabetes self-management practices.

Figure 1: Diabetes Mortality in Alaska, 1980-1995



References:

1. Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Survey. Alaska Division of Public Health, Section of Community Health and Emergency Medical Services.
2. Schraer CD, Adler A, Mayer AM, et. al. Diabetes complications and mortality among Alaska Natives: 8 years of observation. *Diabetes Care* 1997;20:314-21.
3. Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics 1995 Annual Report.
4. US Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. *Diabetes in the United States: A strategy for prevention*, 1994