

Focus on the FY2002 Budget:

Back to Basics

Back to Basics is Gov. Tony Knowles' \$2.3 million budget initiative aimed at reinforcing Alaska's eroding public health system to prevent the spread of infectious disease. The promotion and protection of public health is a fundamental function of state government under the Alaska Constitution.

'Our state's public health protection is eroding in a silent way – the fight is never over.'

**--Karen Perdue
Health & Social Services**

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Tracking and treating diseases such as TB is extremely labor intensive. An outbreak earlier this year within a single Anchorage family stretched the city's health department nearly to the breaking point.

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In one Alaska village, three fourths of the people now skin test positive for TB.

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Alaska has the nation's eighth highest rate of chlamydia.

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The number of Alaskans with sexually transmitted diseases has risen an estimated 300 percent since 1997.

What's the problem?

- ***Old diseases such as tuberculosis and measles are reemerging in our state***

In 1999, 61 Alaskans were diagnosed with active tuberculosis and they exposed at least 744 others. Combined, these cases required nearly 60,000 visits by public health nurses and aides to ensure that patients took their medications properly.

Primarily due to a lack of public health resources for follow-up, only 80 percent of those diagnosed and only about half of those exposed completed their treatment.

- ***Newer diseases such as hepatitis C and chlamydia also are on the rise***

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted disease that often leads to infertility in women. In a recent study, one Alaska health clinic found that 14 percent of pregnant women screened tested positive for chlamydia, compared to a national rate of about 3 percent. Sixty percent of their partners also tested positive.

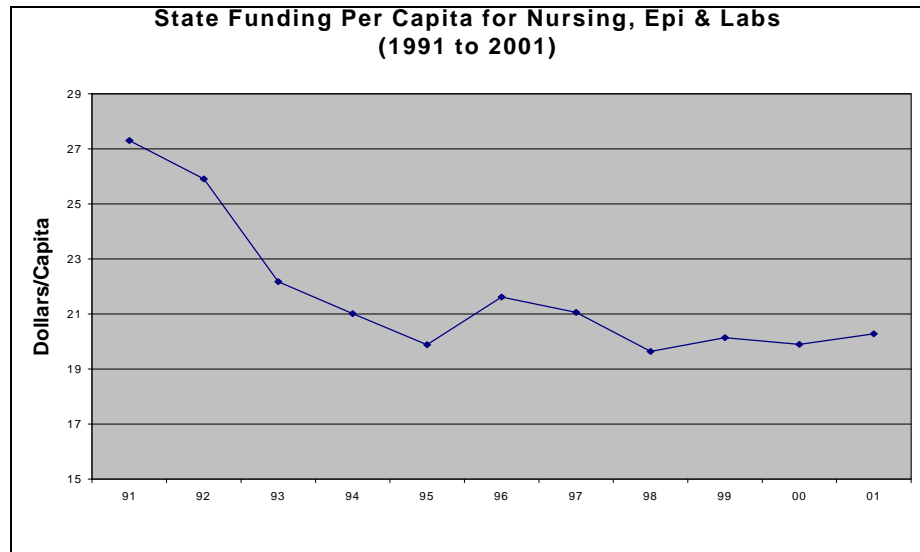
- ***Bacterial and viral disease outbreaks are ongoing***

Major influenza outbreaks have erupted during the past three summer tourist seasons. Thousands of people traveling by rail became ill due to contaminated ice. Several disease outbreaks have been traced to Alaska restaurants-hundreds of people have been sickened.

- ***Preventing the spread of disease costs more today***

In 1980, an Alaska child needed eight doses of vaccine to be fully immunized. In 2000, every child needs 21 doses of vaccine. In 20 years, the total number of vaccinations required to protect Alaska's children has increased from less than 1 million to 4.5 million.

- **Alaska's population has grown while state dollars spent on basic public health have remained virtually unchanged. The fastest growing segments of our population – the young and the elderly -- are the most vulnerable to disease.**



What should be done?

Back to Basics has three interdependent parts:

- **Public health nursing:** \$1.27 million to hire 11 public health nurses and 4 support staff; provide supplies and travel to assure immediate response and ongoing management of outbreaks of contagious disease; deliver immunizations; and conduct health screening for families at risk.
- **Public health laboratory:** \$350,000 for lab supplies and two microbiologists to conduct screening tests, confirm diagnoses and find sources of disease.
- **Epidemiology:** \$659,000 for a physician, nurses, biostatistician and other staff needed to improve data collection and analysis; and to direct efforts to control and reduce disease outbreaks.

In addition to these three major *Back to Basics* components, the governor's budget includes funding for the following items aimed at protecting the public's health:

- \$300,000 to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to coordinate and manage the state's battle against persistent organic pollutants;
- \$200,000 to the state's Epidemiology section to monitor the impact on Alaskans of contaminants in subsistence and recreational foods from Alaskan waters;
- \$220,000 to DEC to increase the number of inspections of high-risk food operations in Alaska.