

Background Document for Proposed Repeal of Tuberculosis Screening of School Children (7 AAC 27.213)

- Alaska has the highest rate of tuberculosis (TB) in the U.S. and, as such, TB control remains a high priority for public health in the state.
- Tuberculosis is not evenly distributed across Alaska. The Northern and Southwest regions of the state have the highest rates and Alaska Native individuals are disproportionately affected. Many other regions of the state have few, if any, TB cases.
- National expert guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), United States Preventive Services Task Force, and American Academy of Pediatrics now recommend against universal screening for tuberculosis in general, as it is low-yield, an inefficient use of resources, and may result in an unacceptable rate of false positive tests.^{1,2,3} Rather, a more targeted approach is recommended, i.e., testing only those who have identified risk factors for tuberculosis. Most children in Alaska do not have risk factors for TB.
- CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics have not recommended routine TB screening for schoolchildren since the mid-1990's.⁴
- Out of an abundance of caution, and because of historically higher TB rates in the state, Alaska public health continued to recommend the practice beyond that time. However, as the Division of Public Health continued to analyze this practice over the years, it was found that TB screening of schoolchildren across the state was not effective in finding new cases of TB despite being highly resource-intensive for both public health and school districts.
- Therefore, starting in 2013, the Alaska Division of Public Health began a process of gradually refining the practice through a series of incremental steps and regulatory changes to move, first, to more targeted school screening and, eventually, towards elimination of school screening, in alignment with CDC guidelines. This process was undertaken in a methodical and data-driven manner and involved communication with, and feedback from, school district, community health, and tribal health partners at each step of the way. Stakeholders were, in large part, supportive of these changes.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children and adolescents be screened for TB risk factors, and tested for TB if risk factors are present, by their primary health provider as part of routine preventive care.⁵
- Alaska Division of Public Health continues to test children at increased risk for TB as part of TB case contact investigations as well as community-wide screenings which occur in communities with known TB activity. Elimination of universal TB screening in schools allows limited resources to be re-directed to these much more effective TB prevention and control activities.⁶

¹ [Official American Thoracic Society/Infectious Diseases Society of America/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Clinical Practice Guidelines: Diagnosis of Tuberculosis in Adults and Children](#)

² <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/recommendation/latent-tuberculosis-infection-screening>

³ Red Book: 2021–2024 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases By: Committee on Infectious Diseases, American Academy of Pediatrics, David W. Kimberlin, MD, FAAP, Elizabeth D. Barnett, MD, FAAP, Ruth Lynfield, MD, FAAP, Mark H. Sawyer, MD, FAAP

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00038873.htm>

⁵ https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/periodicity_schedule.pdf

⁶ ["School-based screening for tuberculous infection. A cost-benefit analysis." JAMA 1995 Aug 23-30;274\(8\):613-9](#)