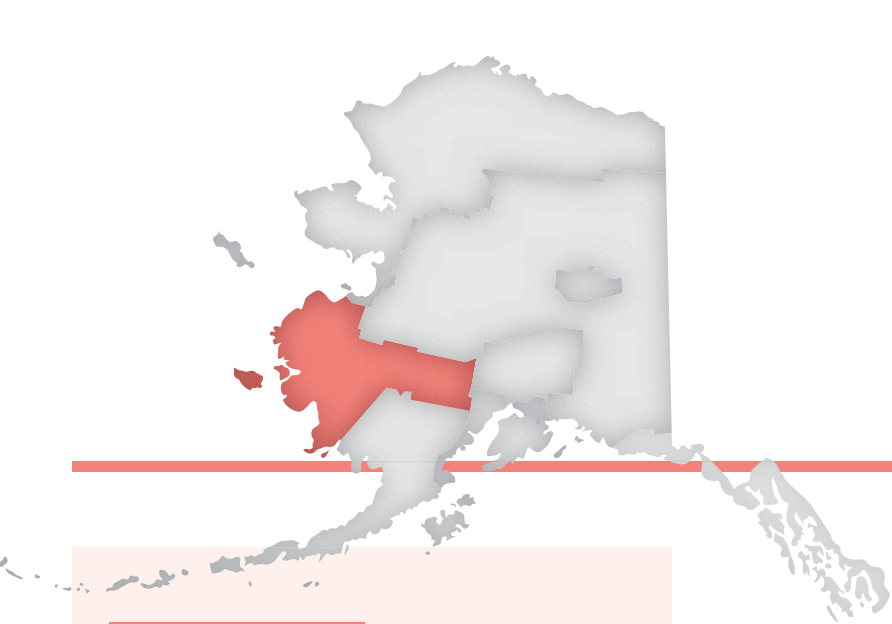




YUKON-KUSKOKWIM DELTA REGION

REGION OVERVIEW

The Yukon-Kuskokwim (YK) Delta region of Alaska is a vast, remote, and predominantly Indigenous area covering more than 75,000 square miles. It is home to 27,000 people, the majority of whom are Yup'ik and Cup'ik Alaska Natives who live in 58 rural communities. Bethel, 400 air miles from Anchorage, is the largest community. It serves as an economic, healthcare, and transportation hub. The region is largely roadless, with most transportation relying on boats in the summer, snowmachines in the winter, and small aircraft year-round.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Yup'ik and Cup'ik culture is strong, and the languages remain widely spoken. The region is characterized by strong cultural traditions, subsistence lifestyles, and deep connections to the land. Despite past suppression, cultural revitalization now emphasizes self-determination, language preservation, and healing. Families rely on salmon, moose, waterfowl, and berries as primary food sources. Extended families live closely together, and kinship networks are strong, providing emotional and economic support. Adoption is culturally accepted and common.

*All data
2019-2023 unless
otherwise noted.*

MATERNAL HEALTH DATA SUMMARY

The YK Delta region faces significant maternal and infant health challenges, with the highest crude birth rate in Alaska, a teen birth rate over three times the statewide average, and a fertility rate nearly double the state rate. Preterm births and infant mortality are also more prevalent,

while access to prenatal care remains limited. Medicaid plays a critical role in supporting birth outcomes in the region, covering 94% of births compared to 54% statewide.

	Y-K Delta	Statewide
General fertility rate	118.6	65.0
Teen birth rate	56.7	16.3
Preterm births	16.7%	10.0%
Low birth weight infants	8.8%	6.7%
Prenatal care in first trimester	53.0%	73.3%
Adequate or better prenatal care	39.3%	66.6%
Cesarean births among low-risk pregnancies	4.4%	18.5%
Cesarean births	9.3%	23.1%
Cigarette smoking during pregnancy	17.2%	9.3%
Infant mortality rate (2014-2023)	13.1	6.4
Crude Birth Rate	24.3	13.2
Average annual births	650	8,758
Medicaid Births (average annual)	609	5,128
% of births to Medicaid	94%	54%

94%
births covered
by Medicaid

SYSTEM OF CARE

Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) provides OB care to approximately 600 patients annually, with one-third transferred to Anchorage for delivery. Initial prenatal visits take place in Bethel, with follow-ups conducted by Community Health Aides and Practitioners (CHA/Ps), nurse practitioners, or physician assistants. Patients from outlying villages must return to Bethel for anatomy scans, glucose challenge tests, and relocate at 36 weeks for delivery, or earlier if high-risk. Postpartum care includes a 24-to-48 hour hospital stay, follow-ups within three days of returning to the village, and additional visits at 7-14 days and six weeks postpartum.

Travel primarily relies on fixed-wing aircraft, with the limited option of boats during summer (when rivers are flowing) and snowmobiles during winter (when rivers are frozen).

YKHC operates a licensed 32-bed Pre-Maternal Home in Bethel, where pregnant people arrive about one month before their due date. Residents are housed four to a room, grouped by region, with classes and vaccination services provided during their stay. Medicaid covers the cost of housing, but other children and escorts are not allowed to stay at the facility.

Due to the hands-on nature of prenatal care, telehealth use for maternity services is limited but it is used for postpartum care and behavioral health whenever possible.

Births in YK Delta Region Hospitals/Birth Centers

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5 year total	5 year average	% of statewide births	% change over 5 years
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Hospital	394	393	369	358	317	1,831	366		-19.54%
Total Births in YK Delta Hospital	394	393	369	358	317	1,831	366	4%	-19.54%
Total Births to Region Residents	706	650	625	637	632	3,250	650	7%	-10.48%
# Births leaving region	312	257	256	279	315	1,419	284		
% of births leaving region	44%	40%	41%	44%	50%	44%	44%		
# Births leaving region	334	325	329	338	292	1,618	324		
% of births leaving region	71%	66%	72%	77%	69%	71%	71%		

STRENGTHS

REDUCED POSTPARTUM HEMORRHAGE RATES:

Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation has successfully reduced postpartum hemorrhage rates by implementing innovative protocols, including liquid misoprostol for labor induction and the Jada System device for postpartum hemorrhage management, enhancing patient safety and care. They have focused on care plans and huddles for postpartum hemorrhage risk assessment and management. Upgraded postpartum hemorrhage carts provide improved accessibility to supplies and micro-cool drawers; the addition of a Jada System device promotes uterine contraction and reduces bleeding. These measures have enhanced maternal safety and outcomes in the region.

ENHANCED LACTATION SUPPORT: Nurses receive expanded lactation certification, ensuring mothers have access to high-quality breastfeeding guidance.

SUPPORTIVE PREMATERNAL HOUSING: A new prematernal housing facility groups patients by region, creating a strong support network. It also provides educational classes and vaccination services during extended stays, promoting overall maternal and infant well-being.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO PRENATAL CARE: Streamlined Medicaid processing helps ensure timely prenatal care, while case managers assist with travel logistics and appointments, reducing barriers to care.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC): YKHC is a Tribal Health Organization that provides comprehensive healthcare services for 58 rural communities in southwest Alaska and is the only healthcare provider in the region. YKHC's healthcare delivery system includes community clinics in 41 villages, sub-regional clinics in five larger communities, a regional hospital in Bethel, dental and optometry services, behavioral health services, counseling and treatment for individuals with substance use disorders, health promotion and disease prevention programs, and environmental health services.

Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Hospital, Bethel: The 50-bed hospital offers outpatient family medicine, pediatric care, obstetrics and women's health, pharmacy, lab, and diagnostic imaging services. It houses the region's only emergency room and offers inpatient care, serves as a Level 4 Trauma center, and has limited surgical services on site.

Sub-Regional Clinics: Aniak, Emmonak, Hooper Bay, St. Mary's, and Toksook Bay: Larger sub-regional clinics in five "hub" communities have year-round advanced practice providers offering preventative and urgent care, limited prenatal care, laboratory tests, x-rays, and limited medications on site.

Village Clinics are located in 41 communities. They are staffed by Office Assistants and CHA/P who are certified by the State of Alaska to offer primary care services.

CHALLENGES

DELAYS IN FIRST-TRIMESTER CARE: Some pregnant people experience delays in prenatal appointments due to pending Medicaid approvals, which can impact high-risk pregnancies.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ACCESS: Clinician shortages and long wait times (up to three months unless in crisis) limit timely access to mental health services.

WEATHER-RELATED TRAVEL DISRUPTIONS: The region's remote location and harsh weather conditions can impact travel and delay access to healthcare and prenatal care.

LIMITED SURGICAL TRAINING: Providers need additional operating room training due to limited local surgical experience.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY HOUSING GAPS: There is insufficient housing for mothers with other children during prematernal stays, making extended stays challenging.

HIGH MATERNITY CARE SHORTAGE SCORES: All communities and clinics in the Y-K Delta Region have a MCTA (Maternity Care Target Area) score of at least 20, with many in the Bethel Census Area scoring 24—the highest level of maternity care shortages in Alaska.

RECOMMENDATIONS / OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

EXPAND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES: Prioritize postpartum mental health care and increase telehealth offerings to improve accessibility and support.

DEVELOP MIDWIFERY SERVICES: Explore adoption of a midwife model of care using Manillaq and ANMC as examples. The use of CNMs and doulas could strengthen care and improve outcomes.

STRENGTHEN LACTATION SUPPORT: Enhance post-discharge breastfeeding services and expand telehealth resources for continued lactation guidance.

HOUSING: Increase availability of family-friendly accommodation during prematernal stays.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: Expand parent education classes, including lactation and newborn care.

MEDICAID PROCESSING: Streamline approvals to minimize delays in accessing prenatal care and improve communication so women understand prenatal care can be accessed prior to Medicaid approval.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS**PERINATAL CARE PROVIDERS**

There are no birth centers or home birth services in the region

OBGYN: One specialist serves the region.

Family medicine with OB Services: Six providers, some with cesarean privileges.

Midwives: One CNM provides prenatal care only.

Women's Care & Support Center: Located next to the Pre-Maternal Home, the Center houses the case management staff and Centering Pregnancy prenatal care sessions.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

YKHC offers mental health and substance abuse treatment services, including medication-assisted therapy for opioid addiction.

