

# Test your knowledge of Arctic health

By Dr. Ted Mala

1. What is considered to be the major cause of suicide, homicide, and alcoholism in northern regions?

2. Why are mental health problems increasing among Natives?

3. Why have diseases like tuberculosis, hepatitis, skin diseases and allergies gone down in the north?

4. How long does it take for a newcomer to "acclimatize" or get used to living in the far north?

5. How much water is needed per person per day in a village or community according to the World Health Organization?

6. True or False: Bacteria live longer in cold water.

7. What is one of the main causes of alcoholism and family problems in circumpolar countries?

8. Should we worry about air pollution in the north?

9. Is there an "acid rain" problem in Alaska?

10. What does a community need before it can get ahead both socially and economically?

The answers:

1. Stress.

2. Caused by our quickly changing lifestyles.

3. Because of better living conditions in our environments (better housing, sanitation and health aide clinics and hospitals).

4. About two or three years.

5. 45 quarts (a little over 11 gallons).

6. TRUE.

7. Not enough room to live and lack of privacy at home. People prefer to live in their

own house instead of multi-story buildings and need more room to be by themselves.

8. Although our air is clean and clear now, we should know that this thing called "Arctic Haze" is something new that has come to Alaska. We are starting to get carbon particles in our air from the factories of the Soviet Union. Scientists believe that these particles are absorbing so much sunlight that our air temperatures are being raised which could potentially very slowly start the polar ice cap melting. Arctic Haze is worse between the months of March and April and spreads over the Arctic like a blanket.

9. Not yet. Acid rain refers to sulphuric acid which is carried in the air and falls to the ground. This acid has already killed the fish in hundreds of lakes in the U.S., Canada and Scandinavia. We might see some sulphuric acid coming our way from the explosion of the El Chichon volcano in Mexico. Only time will tell how it will affect the Arctic where air pollutants are held down on the ground by "inversion layers" (like ice fog) and don't easily go away.

10. Good health and good basic sanitation.

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When the World Health Organization refers to the "Arctic" and "Sub-Arctic" they are talking about three quarters of all of the land in Alaska and the 50,000 people that live there.

The Canadians have about 300,000 people in their northern areas; Norway has about 45,000 people (in Tromsø

City); Finland has 10,000 Laplanders; Russia has about 60,000 people in their most northern city (Norilsk) and Greenland, which is completely made up of arctic and sub-arctic regions has 50,000 people (40,000 Inuit and 10,000 Danes).

I am not sure how many Natives are in the Russian northern areas but we do know that they are moving many newcomers to the north. The city that I visited in Siberia (called Novosibirsk) a few months ago had more than two million people in it alone.

From this you see that are a lot of us who live and work in the north and are concerned about what the future holds in store for us.

How did you do on the "test"? These are just a few of the many questions and problems we are thinking about as we try to put together our arctic science research policy.

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I told you a few weeks ago that the latest health statistics for the U.S. show that the "average" age for Alaska Natives is 69 years while the rest of the US is 76. Well, times are changing, my friends. My aunt Emma Black in Anchorage was born in Kobuk 89 years ago and is still sewing dolls today.

If we take care of ourselves and surround ourselves with people who love and care for us, you and I just might be around longer than we think. We only have one body and it has to last us for all of our lives.