● NUTRITION NEWS

Stomach cancer from food

By MARGUERITE STETSON

Cancer of the stomach is a real concern for rural Alaskans. During the period 1972 through 1974 there were 12 cases reported in Alaska. This is twice the average that would be expected for any one population. Of these cases, two were under 30 years old.

Normally, stomach cancer is diagnosed in persons over 30 years old--mostly males. The current research indicates that the stage is set during the first 10 years of life for the development of this kind of cancer in later years.

There seems to be a relationship between pernicious anemia and stomach cancer. Pernicious anemia is caused when nitrates are changed into nitrites. This occurs when foods are stored at room temperature instead of under refrigeration. Nitrates can also change into nitrites in the mouth and in the stomach when there is less acid than normal in these locations. It is possible for the mouth to be less acid when there is a large number of cavities.

Most of the research points to nitrites as the cause of stomach cancer. Nitrites are formed from nitrates. Nitrates are often found in water. They are in meats such as ham and bologna to prevent botulism. Nitrates are in salted foods, such as dry fish and pickled vegetables.

Nitrates do not seem to change to nitrites in the presence of ascorbic acid--or vitamin C. There seems to be a decreased risk of stomach cancer when lettuce and green, fresh, leafy vegetables are eaten.

Dietary prevention of anemia includes eating foods high in iron, such as liver, along with foods that are high in folic acid, such as leafy green vegetables. These same foods, with the addition of vitamin C foods, such as oranges and cabbage, might help prevent stomach cancer. Since the study points to this cancer starting in the first ten years of life, it is most important that the foods children eat contain these food selections.