

PUBLIC HEALTH

Health Outlook for 1935 Is Considered Favorable

Cancer Control Seems Closer; No Influenza Epidemic Foreseen; Decline Expected in Tuberculosis

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NINETEEN thirty-four has been a good health year. My prediction made a year ago for Science Service has been fulfilled in virtually every particular.

We have had no serious outbreak of influenza. The deathrate from this disease has been about one-half of what it was in 1933, and, barring an outbreak in the final two weeks of December, we shall have, this year, the lowest influenza mortality rate experienced since 1921. The mortality from tuberculosis has continued to decline; and we in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company are rejoicing because, this year, for the first time in the history of the millions of our industrial policy-holders of the white race, the tuberculosis deathrate has dropped below 50 per 100,000. Diphtheria has caused fewer deaths than ever before. While there has been a slightly higher mortality this year than last from the other principal infections of childhood, namely, measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough, the deathrate for all have remained low.

Diseases of Aged Increasing

It is true that poliomyelitis was unusually prevalent in the late spring and during the summer in the western section of the country, especially in California; but this outbreak was brought under control more speedily than in previous epidemics, and the number of deaths per 100 cases was appreciably lower than has been observed in prior outbreaks of poliomyelitis. The crude rates for heart disease, cancer and diabetes have risen, as we expected they would, because of the advancing average age of the population. We have had more fatal accidents both on the streets and in the factories. This reflects improved economic conditions. More persons are employed this year than last and more are thus subject to the hazards

of industry; motor vehicle traffic, both pleasure and commercial, has increased on our highways, and this automatically has raised the chances of automobile fatalities.

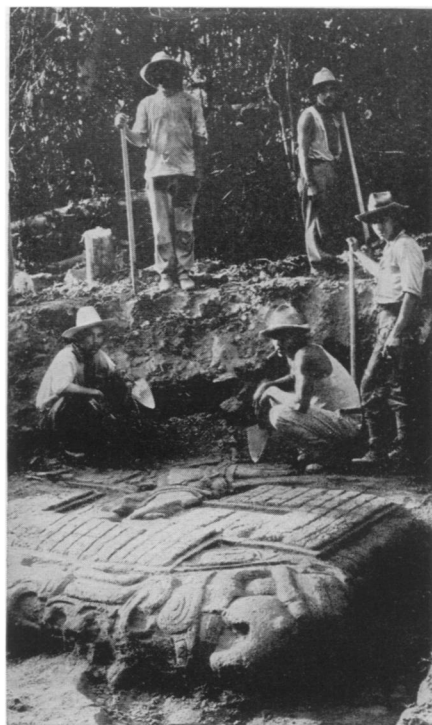
More Pneumonia

The only important development for which we were not prepared was a sizeable increase in the deathrate from pneumonia—in spite of the fact that there has been less influenza. This is a most unusual phenomenon, as high deathrates from these diseases ordinarily go together. It is clear that relatively few of the fatal pneumonia cases during 1934 were of influenzal origin. The unusually cold weather of last winter doubtless played an important role, although it is true that even in the warmer months pneumonia mortality has been considerably higher this year than last. Whatever the cause, the increase in deaths from pneumonia is unmistakable.

Taken altogether, however, health conditions have held up very well in 1934 in spite of the fact that there are still millions of unemployed. I would not be surprised to find the final figure, when it becomes possible to calculate the deathrate for the completed year accurately, pretty close to that of 1933, when it was the lowest on record.

The prospects for 1935, in my judgment, are very good. There are no unfavorable signs on the horizon. The new year is not likely to be what we call "an influenza year." Past experience has been that a peak in the mortality from this disease is reached every third year. Inasmuch as the last severe outbreak occurred early in 1933, I hardly expect that we shall be faced with another in 1935. Of course, much is still unknown about the periodicity of epidemics; and weather conditions, always unpredictable, may be an important influence.

Diphtheria, I believe, will continue to fall to lower and lower levels, because the campaign against it has been successful. This has been brought about, for



ANCIENT AMERICAN ALTAR

The most famous of the abandoned Mayan cities in tropical America still yield secrets. At ruins of Quirigua, Guatemala, the Carnegie Institution last season found two exquisitely carved altars which were dedicated 1,400 years ago. Workers are shown unearthing one of these altars, which is decorated with the figure of a masked dancer in elaborate costume. (See SNL, March 31, 1934).

the most part, by immunization against the disease, and interest in immunization continues strong. No single development in the entire public health field has been more widely acclaimed than the reduction—almost to the vanishing point—of the mortality from this former scourge of childhood. The other infectious diseases of childhood are now of comparatively little moment. Scarlet fever, for example, is likely to follow diphtheria into the rank of the utterly preventable diseases.

I believe that tuberculosis will continue to behave according to formula, that is, with every succeeding year we shall observe a reduction in the deathrate. We are nearing the end of the fight against tuberculosis. It is destined in a few years to rank among the minor causes of death—and the greatest reduction in mortality has taken place in the wage-earning population where the situation has always been the gravest. The big desideratum now is to provide bed care for open cases on a larger scale than ever before. There is a very spe-