

PUBLIC HEALTH

Drafts Do Cause Colds

It is not an old maid's notion that it is not wise to sit in drafty places. A scientific investigation shows temperature changes affect number and severity of colds.

► THE LAYMAN'S ideas that sudden drops in temperature are likely to bring on a cold and that drafts have something to do with catching cold got scientific confirmation in a report by Dr. Joseph H. Kler, of New Brunswick, N. J., to the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology meeting in Chicago.

In a study of colds among 5,500 employees of Johnson and Johnson in New Brunswick and Chicago from July, 1942, to February, 1944, Dr. Kler found that every sudden drop in temperature was followed in a day or two by a rise in the number of colds.

Shipping departments, which are usually drafty places, he also found, had uniformly a high general incidence of colds and a high incidence of time-losing colds. There were fewer colds in air-conditioned plants.

Sex, age and the working posture were also found to have a bearing on the number and severity of colds. There were many more time-losing colds among women throughout the year, and what Dr. Kler believes may be fully as important in the increased severity of colds, the majority of colds in women came at the menstrual period.

The largest number of colds occurred in the 20-29 year age group and the lowest in the age group above 50 years. The percentage of time-losing colds, however, increased with age.

There were consistently more colds among office employees than among factory employees. Posture also had a marked influence on the severity of colds. The smallest percentage of time-losing colds

was found among those who walk about at their jobs and the highest among those who mostly sit at their jobs.

Smoking apparently had little effect on colds. Almost half, 45%, of those with colds did not smoke at all. The influence of vitamins on incidence and severity of colds was "questionable."

Early treatment seems to be of greatest value at present, Dr. Kler said. The number and severity of colds was greater in Chicago than in the New Brunswick plant and offices, but the time loss was lower. This is explained, he believes, by the fact that much more attention was paid to treatment of colds in Chicago.

Colds came in cycles, the peaks being in December and October. The December peak is the highest. The low point of incidence is in July. Besides this seasonal variation, Dr. Kler found a relation between colds and week-ends. In New Jersey during the winter the largest number of colds started on Saturday, while during the rest of the year a slightly larger number started on Mondays. In Chicago almost as many colds started on Monday as on all other days of the week combined. This week-end factor showed more among the men than the women and was not related to temperature changes.

In urging further investigations on the common cold, Dr. Kler pointed out that they are responsible for more than one-third the total number of days lost in American industry. They cause a productive time loss of 100 million working days each year with an annual cost of one-half to two billion dollars.

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due in part at least to release of pyrexin from the red cells.

Boiling does not destroy the fever-inducing action of pyrexin and tests with mice and rabbits show that it is not injurious to animal tissues. It may, therefore, be valuable in treating central nervous system disorders, for example, Dr. Menkin suggests, for fever treatment of syphilis of the central nervous system.

Pyrexin's mode of action, he believes, may be on fever centers in the hypothalamic region of the brain.

Science News Letter, October 21, 1944

AGRICULTURE

Tropical Farming School Opened in Honduras

► A SCHOOL of Pan American agriculture was formally opened Thursday, Oct. 12, to provide technical education in American tropical agriculture particularly for students from Mexico, Central America and the West Indies. Its faculty includes scientists and educators from Middle America and from the United States.

Escuela Agricola Panamericana is the official name of the new institution of learning. It will be conducted as a practical work-while-learning laboratory, furnishing free and expert technical training to a permanent enrollment of at least 160 young men carefully selected from Middle America.

When their training is completed, students of the School of Pan American Agriculture are expected to apply their technical knowledge and experience to the problems of their home lands.

The opening of this technical school promises to be an event of more than local interest. As a result of the war Middle America is now supplying the United States with products formerly obtained in the Far East, and will probably continue to do so in the future because of the great agricultural developments that have already taken place. The Western Hemisphere may become agriculturally self-sufficient. To promote this self-sufficiency is one of the objectives of the new institution.

The Escuela Agricola Panamericana was founded and is endowed by the United Fruit Company, but will be divorced from the personnel requirements of any particular company or commercial employer. It will function under a board of regents, five of whom are Central Americans. Its establishment and location were authorized by the National Congress of Honduras.

Science News Letter, October 21, 1944

MEDICINE

Fever Chemical Discovered

► DISCOVERY of a chemical that apparently is the cause of the fever that comes with inflammations is announced by Dr. Valy Menkin, of Duke University School of Medicine (*Science*, Oct. 14).

It is a nitrogen-containing substance which Dr. Menkin has christened pyrexin, following the medical custom of using the word pyrexia, borrowed from

the Greek, for fever.

Pyrexin was obtained from inflammatory discharges such as that in pleurisy. Blood serum containing hemoglobin from ruptured red blood cells also contains the chemical. This suggests that pyrexin is liberated from red cells ruptured in the course of injury or disease.

The chills and fever of malaria may be