

MEDICINE

FDA Says Enovid 'Safe'

► THE BIRTH CONTROL PILL Enovid is safe enough to stay on the market, but its use by women over 35 is risky, the Food and Drug Administration reported in Washington, D. C.

FDA has asked the manufacturer, G. D. Searle and Co., Chicago, to warn physicians of the potential dangers of prescribing the drug by changing the accompanying literature.

An official of Searle said that the company will comply with FDA requests "right away." It is expected that the FDA announcement "may have some minor influence" on sales. However, the majority of Enovid users are believed to be under age 35.

FDA recommendations were based on a report by a committee of medical specialists. The chairman was Dr. Irving S. Wright of New York. Committee members came from universities and hospitals around the country, to study the question.

Enovid, first oral contraceptive approved by the FDA for sale in the U.S., came again to FDA's notice through reports that women taking the pills had developed serious or fatal blood clots.

The other birth control pill on the market, Ortho-Novum, made by the Ortho Pharmaceutical Corp., Raritan, N. J., is excluded

from the current investigation. Although its chemical make-up is nearly identical to that of Enovid, Ortho-Novum is new in use and no side-effects or deaths have yet been reported.

After a thorough review of the available evidence on Enovid and after conducting studies and surveys of their own, the committee found that women under 35 taking Enovid face no greater risk of death from blood-clotting than non-pregnant women in the general population, but that Enovid users ages 35-44 face a greater risk of death from the thromboembolism than non-users.

FDA said that it is up to the individual physician to weigh the "apparent hazard" of developing clots against the danger of pregnancy for his patient. However, FDA noted, presence of certain cancers, liver diseases or a history of clots in veins or lungs calls for caution in prescribing the drug.

A casual relationship between taking Enovid and developing a thromboembolism has not yet been demonstrated, nor are investigations of clotting compounds in the blood of Enovid users and nonusers conclusive. Enovid is currently recommended for short term use only (two to four years), and primarily in cases where pregnancy is not advised.

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BIOLOGY

Algae Studied on Islands

► FOUR MAN-MADE islands in the Chesapeake Bay are being used to study the zone growth patterns of algae, the possible future food of millions.

Spreading across the mouth of the bay at Norfolk, Va., the islands were built as part of the nearly completed Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. The rocks composing the islands were brought from stone quarries and were free of vegetation when the engineers built the islands.

Dr. Jacques S. Zaneveld, chairman of the biology department at Old Dominion College in Norfolk, and his student assistants have been examining the island rocks every 14 days to note the growth of algae.

"There are now definite horizontal bands of algae on the rocks," Dr. Zaneveld told SCIENCE SERVICE, "varying in color depending on the depth. The green algae are located near the surface and the red algae farther down."

Using aqualung equipment, his assistants study the growth of algae as far down as 15 meters, or approximately 49 feet. Since 1961, Dr. Zaneveld has had a National Science Foundation grant to study the zone growth of algae from Cape May in New Jersey to Cape Hatteras in North Carolina.

After this study is completed, he and his student assistant, Willard Simmonds, will travel to Antarctica to study the growth of algae there.

"There is an abundance of algae at the

South Pole due to nutrients added to the water by the penguins," Dr. Zaneveld said. He will spend an Antarctic summer—December, January and February—studying algae.

The Dutch biologist has been interested in the zone growth of algae since 1937. Previously he worked along the Atlantic coast of the Netherlands, Batavia's Pacific coast in Indonesia and the coast of Curacao, an island near Venezuela.

The stretch of coast between Cape May and Cape Hatteras has never been examined for algae growth. Other biological studies have dealt with the rocky New England coast and the coast from Beaufort, S. C., to Florida.

The particular stretch now under examination by Dr. Zaneveld is interesting from an ecological or environmental aspect because most of it is sandy rather than rocky and therefore attracts different types of algae. The tropical algae reach their northern limits in the Virginia area while the northern algae reach their southern limit there.

"We must know where and in what zones the algae grow, if we are ever to use them on a widespread basis for food," Dr. Zaneveld said. "By knowing where certain types of algae grow, we can also predict where certain kinds of fish will occur."

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Westinghouse

ULTRATHIN—Westinghouse technician Paul Raygor readies equipment to "grow" films of material only ten atoms thick. See story below.

TECHNOLOGY

Special Vacuum Chamber Aids Thin-Film Research

► A SPECIAL ultrahigh vacuum chamber is being used to "grow" films of material only ten atoms thick.

It would take 250,000 of these films to equal the thickness of a newspaper page. The films are "grown" from evaporated materials, a process that must be done in as perfect a vacuum as possible to ensure evenness of plating and freedom from impurities.

The vacuum chamber, which operates at temperatures as low as 320 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, is capable of producing pressures as low as one-trillionth of normal atmospheric pressure.

Apparatus inside the chamber, developed by Dr. P. M. Waters of Westinghouse Research Laboratories in Pittsburgh, Pa., is manipulated from outside, by means of magnets and remote-control mechanisms.

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MEDICINE

Flu Vaccine Produces No Reaction or Fever

► A NEW VACCINE for protection against influenza that produces no painful reaction and rarely causes fever has been developed.

It is of the killed-virus type, and gives protection against the major types of flu for a year, after which a booster shot provides continued immunity. The vaccine was developed by scientists at Sterling-Winthrop Research Institute, Rensselaer, N. Y., and has been licensed by the Government for production by Sterling Drug Inc.

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