

MEDICINE

Flu Shots Still Approved

➤ FLU SHOTS may not be good enough yet for general use, but they are still the "best thing we have," Surgeon General Luther L. Terry of the U.S. Public Health Service said in Washington, D. C.

His statement came after three Public Health Service experts from the Communicable Disease Center, Atlanta, Ga., told a nationwide meeting of the American Public Health Association in Kansas City, Mo., that there is "little evidence" that recent vaccines have "significantly prevented clinical illness."

Dr. James Goddard, assistant surgeon general and chief of PHS' Communicable Disease Center, backed up Dr. Terry at a Kansas City press conference after a premature statement had been made over a press wire.

This statement, which was later recalled, quoted Drs. Alexander D. Langmuir, Donald A. Henderson and Robert E. Serfling, all of the Communicable Disease Center, as saying at the meeting that there is little evidence that deaths of old people or the chronically ill have been prevented by flu shots given in the past three and a half years.

Dr. Terry admitted that deaths had been very high last year as a result of Asian flu—official death figures for all flu cases between January and April 1963 were 55,000—and he said that it is important that improvements be made. But vaccination with present vaccines is still urged by his office for the "high-risk" groups, mostly the elderly and chronically ill.

The Communicable Disease Center paper stated that it is problematical how long the present flu-shot program should be con-

tinued in the face of the little evidence of its proved value. Dr. Langmuir and his collaborators referred to "the major costs to the general public that are entailed."

Both the Surgeon General's office in Washington and Communicable Disease Center officials told SCIENCE SERVICE they agree that obviously more basic research needs to be done on the various influenza and parainfluenza viruses before one vaccine for all types could be expected to be greatly helpful.

Further studies, especially of "polyvalent" vaccine results, are going on.

The monovalent vaccines, that is, one vaccine against one proved virus, are valuable and more important than any polyvalent types so far studied on a wide field trial basis, PHS says.

The Public Health Service said that the report to the American Public Health Association meeting did not refer to a new vaccine announced July 29, 1963 by Sterling-Winthrop Research Institute in New York. (See SNL, 84:119, Aug. 24, 1963)

The new vaccine was licensed by the Government for production by Sterling Drug, Inc. Samples of batches produced by Sterling-Winthrop Research Institute have been submitted to the division of biologics standards of the National Institutes of Health.

This new vaccine could be available to the medical profession in a matter of days once the samples are approved by the division of biologics standards. Win-Vac is the brand name.

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MEDICINE

Polio Outbreaks Possible

➤ OUTBREAKS of paralytic poliomyelitis similar to the one in Jacksonville, Fla., could happen anywhere in the United States, as long as a sizable portion of the population remains unvaccinated.

The successful Salk and Sabin vaccines have reduced the annual national number of victims from the thousands to under 400. But the disease has shifted to unvaccinated persons primarily in the lower socio-economic groups as in the 1963 outbreaks in Philadelphia and Petersburg, Va.

Before the development of polio vaccines, the disease occurred most frequently among persons of higher income status, a National Foundation official told SCIENCE SERVICE.

Dr. Wilson T. Sowder, state health officer in Jacksonville, where 30 cases had been reported by Nov. 27, believes that indifference on the part of the population has kept a large number from being vaccinated.

"It has always been my impression," Dr. Sowder said, "that those who could not afford it could receive the vaccine free from the public health clinics." Like many states, Florida has no compulsory vaccination for

pre-school children against communicable diseases.

In his opinion, most victims could not afford vaccinations. When possible epidemics threatened certain cities this year, and the oral Sabin vaccine was given free on an emergency basis, there was more than a 90% response in those areas, Dr. David Sencer, assistant chief of the Communicable Diseases Center in Atlanta, said.

Most states are trying to improve their immunization programs, Dr. Sencer said, by applying for Federal grants. About eight million dollars was appropriated by Congress in June for this purpose.

There are two types of polio vaccines available to the public. The Salk vaccine, consisting of killed polio viruses, provides protection against all three types of polio, for the person vaccinated. The oral Sabin vaccine consists of live, though weakened, viruses, and three different vaccines protect against the three different types of viruses. The Sabin vaccine is usually given to stop an epidemic.

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Freezing Can Destroy Tumorous Pituitary

➤ THE PITUITARY, "master gland" at the base of the brain, can be destroyed by a new freezing technique which is safer than methods commonly used when removal of the organ is needed.

The technique, called cryohypophysectomy, has been used as a slow-down treatment for advanced, rapidly-spreading breast cancer.

Breast and prostatic cancers depend on hormones so the destruction of the pituitary, which regulates hormone secretion throughout the body, slows down cancer growth in many cases.

Dr. Robert W. Rand, neurosurgeon at the University of California, Los Angeles, Medical School, reported preliminary tests of the new technique at the Pan Pacific Surgical Conference, Honolulu.

He believes the procedure may be a safe treatment for other pituitary-related disorders, such as the muscle-weakening Cushing's disease.

While looking through an X-ray screen, the physician passes a refrigerated probe through tiny holes drilled in the nasal passage and sinuses into the gland.

At first the probe is at room temperature. Once it is on target the temperature is lowered to 292 degrees below zero Fahrenheit with the use of liquid nitrogen. This freezes the tissue, permanently destroying it.

Dr. Rand said the procedure appears to be especially well adapted to destruction of small pituitary tumors that are limited to the bony cavity which houses the gland.

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Nature Note

➤ IN THE earlier days when men wore furs for ornament as well as for warmth, sables, mink and otter were for the prosperous and well-born, but the rarest and costliest of all, ermine, was reserved for royalty alone.

It was rated as worthy of a place on the king's crown itself, next to the gold and jewels. It was even at times against the law for commoners to wear this precious white fur.

Ermine is ermine in the winter, but in spring, summer and earlier autumn it is just weasel. One species of weasel changes from brown to white when the snow falls, and in the white phase, the fur is not only more attractive but is in better condition. It is proverbially hard to catch a weasel, and the white winter weasel, which is an ermine, is just as elusive as he is in his summer phase.

The white winter animal has one black mark—the tip of his tail.

The primitive method of making an ermine cloak was to sew the decapitated skins edge to edge, leaving the black-tipped tails hanging. In the more sophisticated tailoring, extra tails are sometimes sewed in, making many more black spots than would otherwise be the case.

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