

MEDICINE

Rubella Vaccine Urgent

The need for a safe, effective vaccine against German measles is urgent as evidenced by the fact that the 1964-65 epidemics will produce about 30,000 defective U.S. children.

► EVERY EFFORT must now be made to develop a safe, effective vaccine against German measles, or rubella, the American Academy of Pediatrics meeting in Chicago warned.

The 1964-65 epidemics of rubella in this country will produce a total of 30,000 defective children in the United States, said Dr. John L. Sever, head of the section on infectious diseases, perinatal research branch of the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness, Bethesda, Md.

During the past session of Congress an extra one million dollars was appropriated to pay for additional research on a rubella vaccine. Contracts will soon be awarded to industry and universities qualified to undertake the research.

Information from the Collaborative Perinatal Research Study on rubella, including data from the 1964 epidemic and reports of a rubella symposium, takes up the entire issue of the American Journal of Diseases of Children, 110:366, 1965.

More than 6,000 pregnant women were under study during the 1964 epidemic, of whom 10% reported exposure to rubella during the first three months. Contrary to previous belief, Dr. Sever stated, "household and nonhousehold exposures were equally likely to result in rubella. Even incidental exposure of pregnant women must be considered seriously."

Fortunately, 85% of pregnant women in

the United States have been found immune to German measles and need not fear getting this simple but dangerous disease.

To determine if a woman is susceptible to rubella, the fluorescent antibody method or the neutralization test are now becoming available through hospital and state laboratories throughout the country.

Newborn babies can become "typhoid Marys" of rubella, transmitting infection to hospital personnel and other contacts for a period of at least six months. A pregnant nurse, for example, can be infected by one of the babies who is a rubella carrier.

Some babies have easily recognizable rashes along with jaundice that has been caused by hepatitis when they are only three days old. Some have severe congenital glaucoma or congenital cataracts. Enlarged lymph nodes were observed in many infants, and bones were demineralized in others. Anemia, thrombocytopenia, in which blood platelets are reduced below normal, genitourinary defects, as well as congenital heart disease and enlarged spleen or liver are some of the abnormalities in rubella-damaged babies.

Dr. Sever said that congenital defects occur in 20% of the babies of women who have rubella in the first three months of pregnancy. The risk is greatest during the first month.

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Help Teen-Age Problems

► MANY POTENTIALLY SERIOUS adolescent problems could be nipped in the bud, if family doctors would help interpret teen-agers to their parents, the American Academy of Pediatrics was told.

Doctors should give advice to parents of teen-agers in the same way they have long advised mothers of infants, Dr. Kurt Glaser of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, Md., reported.

He said doctors can, for instance, judge the importance of a teen-age threat of suicide.

Casual statements such as "I wish I were dead," may mean little or they may indicate a serious conflict.

Doctors who inquire routinely into the adolescent's school achievement, social activities and sex education as part of periodic health examinations are able to build up a background with which to assess a suicide threat.

"The physician's job is to analyze the severity of the psychological disturbance of the child and to interpret the situation to the parents so that they may take action." Action might range from reducing academic pressure to psychiatric referral.

In short, the physician must let the

mother know that emotional disturbances are his business and that he is interested, save time for personal questions and avoid a hurried approach, and keep records of the child's psychological adjustment as part of a routine medical history.

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Disease, Bedwetting Link

► PARENTS should not scold children for being lazy or contrary about going to the bathroom. Postponement until the last minute could mean a diseased urethra, the tube leading from the urinary bladder to the outside.

Continued bedwetting similarly can mean organic disease, Dr. Samuel J. Arnold of Morristown, N.J., told the meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

"Bedwetting is a complaint in about 30% to 50% of known cases of urethral disease," Dr. Arnold said. Surgical treatment often does away with the cause of bedwetting.

The anatomy of the urethral tube, its role in evolution, the upright position and the force of urinary flow all can contribute to the high incidence of urethral disease, the urologist said. The urethra, like the appendix, could be vestigial, Dr. Arnold pointed out.

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Warning Labels Ordered

► THREE DRUGS that have been sold over the counter without prescription since 1955 have now been ordered to have labels warning pregnant women or women who may become pregnant of their danger to an unborn child.

The drugs contain meclizine, cyclizine and chlorcyclizine, which are known to have "teratogenic potential." Teratogenic literally means "causing monsters" and came into popular use after the thalidomide disasters in European and other countries where this sedative was used by pregnant women.

Dr. Joseph S. Sadusk, Medical Director of the Food and Drug Administration, reported the labeling rule at the meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Dr. Sadusk introduced Dr. Paul A. Palmisano, his assistant for medical resources and liaison, who is a pediatrician and will continue to work with the Academy in his relationship with the "medical community." Dr. Palmisano collaborated in the report given by Dr. Sadusk.

The new labeling rule was announced by FDA Commissioner George P. Larrick in the Federal Register (Oct. 27), as a result of new research. The three drugs will continue to be dispensed without prescription for antihistamine uses, but the label will state that the drugs should be taken under the direction of a physician in cases related to pregnancy.

In the case of any article labeled as a prescription drug, FDA has requested a statement to the effect that the "potential benefits" of the three drugs should be weighed against information shown by animal experiments to be dangerous to the fetus.

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Lederle Laboratories

TUBERCULIN TINE TEST—Jack Black of the Lederle Laboratories, Pearl River, N.Y., checks the potency of the diagnostic tuberculin tine test, measured on the skin of a guinea pig sensitized to the tuberculin reaction.