

VD Menace Alarming

By Patricia McBroom

► SOME one and a quarter million people are being attacked by syphilis or gonorrhea every year. In terms of numbers, venereal disease ranks as the nation's top infectious disease problem, Dr. Leslie C. Norins, director of the Venereal Disease Research Laboratory at the Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta, Ga., reported.

Most cases are not reported, so the estimated incidence of 3,000 per day is only a rough guess, Dr. Norins said. But the figures are accurate enough to know that venereal disease among teenagers has doubled in the past decade and that the overall rate has climbed "alarmingly," he said.

Ironically, Dr. Norins attributes the current rise to the success of a post-World War II eradication program.

Venereal disease was high after the war, he said. Then penicillin, which is used to treat both illnesses, came into use and the rate dropped sharply in about 1955. Instead of continuing the eradication program, however, people lost interest and funds were cut back.

In 1959 the rate started to climb again and has been on the rise ever

since. At the same time there has been a shift in the type of victim. Venereal disease is increasingly a middle class and teen-age problem, Dr. Norins said, though reported figures, based mainly on public clinics, do not reflect this shift.

Dr. Norins said a high priority project at the CDC is to develop a vaccine for syphilis. Such a vaccine would not only protect the military forces, but might also be effective against yaws, a skin disease common in some developing countries. Syphilis and yaws germs are very much alike.

Another problem is to find a penicillin substitute to combat gonorrhea. The germ is becoming resistant to penicillin. Luckily, Dr. Norins said, the same is not true of syphilis, a much more serious disease which, left untreated, can lead to brain damage, heart disease, blindness and death, 10 to 15 years after the acute infection has passed.

"If we had one case of smallpox, people would go crazy," he said, "yet we have a million cases of venereal disease and everyone seems quite happy."

Psychiatrists Urged To Help Lessen War Danger

► DR. W. F. MICKLEBURGH of the South Australian Mental Health Services called upon psychiatrists to pool their knowledge with other social scientists in diagnosing unhealthy social systems.

He told the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists in Sydney, that man has seen 14,531 wars in 5,560 years—an average of two and a half wars per year.

Today the United States and Russia have between them an arsenal of nuclear power equal to 20,000 tons of TNT for every human being, Dr. Mickleburgh said, and military scientists are experimenting with chemical warfare, searching for ways of weakening the enemy's resistance with drugs.

Given this atmosphere, psychiatrists should be concerned that innocuous-sounding words are being used to represent mass destruction. Dr. Mickleburgh said, "Megadeath," for instance, means a million people killed. "Take out" means total destruction of people, plants, animal life and property.

Humanity is finely balanced between man ending war and war ending man, he said. "The supreme service psychiatry can render to posterity would be to make some contribution to help tip the balance in favor of survival."

Auto Inspection Spotty

► AUTO SAFETY inspection, unheard of a few years ago, is really making itself felt these days. But it sure hasn't licked the problem.

The number of out-and-out rejects has declined as inspection has become an accepted thing in many states. Yet, of four million vehicles recently inspected by the state of Texas, 43% were found unsafe for today's traffic conditions.

Toll booth attendants on the Pennsylvania Turnpike have had to tell some 12,000 drivers with worn tires either to get their cars "reshod" or stay off the Turnpike. As a result, turnpike deaths from accidents traceable to poor tires have dropped from 26% of all fatal accidents to under 5%!

If attendants could check other possible defects in the cars passing through their gates—defects such as bad brakes, faulty headlights and directional signals—Turnpike officials believe that accidents could be reduced still further.

But even the "mechanically safe" car has come in for a probing look from experts seeking to make it still safer.

In a recent traffic safety symposium

sponsored by the National Academy of Engineering, Dr. William Haddon, Jr., of the New York Department of Health cited an estimate that one-fourth of all automobiles are involved in crashes in which the occupants are either killed or injured as a result of striking the interior compartment. At least half of all drivers killed, he said, received fatal injuries from steering assemblies.

Collapsible steering columns, already a feature on several foreign cars such as the Swedish SAAB, are just being introduced on some American models.

Dr. Allen N. Nahum of the University of California at Los Angeles School of Medicine studied 242 seriously injured motorists and estimated that 90% of their injuries could have been avoided or at least minimized if they had been using a seat belt or shoulder harness.

Yet the lap-style seatbelt, most highly touted safety feature on U.S. cars and now required on all autos in this country, does only a partial job.

Shoulder or chest harnesses, which are standard equipment on at least two

foreign cars, are preferred by most safety authorities because they restrain the upper part of the body from falling forward and striking the instrument panel.

The automobile, of course, is by no means always to blame for accidents. Drivers themselves have more than a little to do with it.

According to the New York City Police Department, the five driving errors most commonly implicated in that city's traffic accidents are:

1. Following too close to another car and consequently losing control.
2. Failing to give a pedestrian the right of way.
3. Failing to give another vehicle the right of way.
4. Failing to stop on signal.
5. Improper turn, failing to keep to the right, and disregard of signs were close contenders for the fifth spot.

In the final analysis, even the safest auto is only as accident-proof as the driver.

With auto manufacturers selling an average of almost nine million cars a year, the results of their being dangerous (or safe) will compound rapidly.