

PUBLIC HEALTH

Disease Fighters Gather To Fight Infantile Paralysis

California Epidemic is Mild and Now Declining, But Investigators Hope to Find Method of Prevention

HEADED by Dr. James P. Leake, veteran disease fighter of the U. S. Public Health Service, medical scientists from various parts of the country are gathered in California for an attack on the mystery of infantile paralysis which is still epidemic out there.

Latest figures received by the U. S. Public Health Service in Washington, D. C., show a drop in the number of new cases and the federal health authorities hope this means that the peak of the epidemic has been reached. For the week ending July 7 there were 316 cases in the entire country, as compared with 338 for the previous week. Of these 267 were reported from California for July 7, and 297 for the previous week.

However, there will still be plenty of material for the scientists to work at in their efforts to find how the disease spreads, how to prevent future epidemics, whether vaccines and convalescent serum are of real use, and whether, as has been suggested by some authorities, there is an inherited tendency to acquire the disease.

Assisting Dr. Leake will be Drs. E. T. Ceder, A. G. Gilliam and W. P. Dearing, of the U. S. Public Health Service.

Drs. Gilliam and Dearing are newcomers to the Service and this epidemic will provide their "baptism of fire," it was learned at the headquarters of the Service.

A Wedding Gift

Dr. Ceder has already won his spurs in typhus fever investigations, in the course of which he contracted the disease. His assignment to California, coming a few days after his marriage, might seem a hardship to some young men, but to Dr. Ceder, already deeply imbued with the U. S. Public Health Service's traditions of devotion to duty, the opportunity to work on this problem will probably seem in the nature of a wedding present.

Besides the officers of the U. S. Public Health Service, Dr. E. C. Rosenow

of the Mayo Clinic and Dr. Leslie T. Webster of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research are now in California conducting independent investigations of the epidemic.

The California epidemic is distinguished for the number of mild, non-paralytic cases, Dr. Leake has found. Consequently he feels there is less reason for persons contemplating travel to California to change their itinerary than there would have been during other epidemics. Nevertheless he does advise that children and youths of susceptible age should not take unnecessary risks of exposure by such travel. With this exception, the present epidemic does not seem to "justify any interference with or discouragement to normal business and recreation."

"Protection of children against undue exertion is wise in the presence of infantile paralysis in any community," Surgeon General Hugh S. Cumming of the U. S. Public Health Service has advised.

Science News Letter, July 21, 1934

ENGINEERING

"De-Silted" Water Endangers Power Plants

RUSHING water, released from the placid lakes behind large dams, may bring disaster to some of the great power plants placed in canyons to utilize impounded river water.

Because this danger may threaten the power plants at Boulder, Grand Coulee, Fort Peck, Norris and other dams, engineers of the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation are studying this problem.

In most cases there is no fear that rapid and deep scour will affect the actual stability of the structures themselves, but it is possible that by lowering the level of the river bed below the "exhaust" outlets from the generator turbines their running efficiency may be reduced.

Water running over loose dirt and rocks produces the same grinding ac-

tion that can be seen when a building is being cleaned with a sand blast. This scour or erosion is the method by which, through many millions of years, rivers have worn great canyons in solid rock.

As the rocks themselves are eroded, the resulting sand and powder is carried downstream and remains in the swirling water until a lake or dam reservoir permits it to settle slowly to the bottom without being stirred up. Then when it goes over a spillway the process begins all over again with renewed energy, and the man-made torrent carries downstream soil away faster than before the dam commenced its work as a filter.

A summary of data on this phenomenon has been compiled by E. W. Lane, research engineer in the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation. It covers most of the major dam failures and maintenance precautions throughout the world in recent years. This problem, he states, is likely to become increasingly important to engineers in the future.

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MEDICINE

Develop Vaccine For Infantile Paralysis

FOR OVER a year Dr. W. T. Harrison of the U. S. Public Health Service has been working on a vaccine to give protection against infantile paralysis, the disease now epidemic in California.

He has already had "encouraging" results in protecting monkeys with the vaccine, but he is not yet ready to try it on humans. The vaccine is made by a special technic which officials of the U. S. Public Health Service are not willing to report at present.

Science News Letter, July 21, 1934



INFANTILE PARALYSIS

an address by

Dr. W. T. Harrison
Of the National Institute of Health

Wednesday, July 25, at 3:30 p. m., Eastern Standard Time, over Stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Each week a prominent scientist speaks over the Columbia System under the auspices of Science Service.