

PUBLIC HEALTH

Isolate Strep Throats

This is the advice given by a Navy doctor. Patients with acute tonsillitis or pharyngitis harbor more infectious germs than those with scarlet fever.

► ISOLATION of patients with streptococcus sore throats for at least two weeks, just as scarlet fever patients are now isolated for three weeks, to prevent spread of their germs was called for by Comdr. Alvin F. Coburn, U. S. Navy Medical Corps, at the meeting of the American Public Health Association, held in New York.

Navy experience during 1943 with a dangerous spread of hemolytic streptococcus germs that gained increased virulence as they spread and apparently came close to wrecking plans for expansion of the Navy led to his emphatic recommendation for a new handling of streptococcus infection to protect the public health.

Patients with acute tonsillitis or pharyngitis harbor streptococcus germs that are more infectious than the strains that cause scarlet fever, he declared. Streptococcus infection of nose and throat without a rash are just as contagious as those with rash and probably more so.

Failure to take account of this and segregate persons who spread contagion facilitated the spread of hemolytic streptococcus infections throughout Naval Training Stations. In 1943 scarlet fever sickness rates exceeded all recorded rates in the U. S. Navy and there were not enough beds to meet the demand. Naval training was handicapped at large and important centers. By the end of 1943 a "dangerous cycle was under way." Several types of hemolytic streptococci had become highly communicable and acquired great virulence. They kept their ability to cause disease when transplanted by carriers to other geographic locations and even started streptococcus outbreaks at Naval activities in the south.

Faced with the possibility of an epidemic of streptococcus infections sweeping throughout all Naval training centers, the surgeon general of the Navy convoked a group of medical officers to meet this challenge. They made just one recommendation: to use sulfa drug prophylaxis. This appeared a heroic measure, but it saved the day.

By June 1944, 600,000 men had been given continuous sulfadiazine prophylaxis, with another 350,000 untreated to

serve as controls. As a result, streptococcus nose and throat diseases were reduced to 10% of the control level. Meningitis was reduced practically to zero. Well advanced streptococcus epidemics were ended and other outbreaks checked at their start. Rheumatic fever cases fell off. There was some decrease in pneumonia, but no benefit in preventing virus diseases.

The prophylaxis, Comdr. Coburn reported, was "at least 85% effective in preventing the implantation of widely disseminated, highly pathogenic strains of hemolytic streptococci in the throats of susceptible recruits and made possible the continuation and expansion of training programs at stations where other measures had failed to prevent the dissemination of hemolytic streptococci."

Sulfa drug prophylaxis to check streptococcus infections can be applied only to military populations. There is nothing as yet to indicate that it can be applied to civilian populations, Capt. Richard Hodges, of the Army, emphasized. He, too, reported the success of the method as used at an Army Air Force technical station. The prolonged course of prophylactic doses of sulfa drugs, he found, fortunately did not make the men less amenable to sulfa drug treatment when needed for pneumonia.

Science News Letter, October 14, 1944

JOURNALISM

Science Service Director Receives Journalism Medal

► WATSON Davis, director of Science Service, was one of the four recipients of bronze journalism medals presented by the School of Journalism, Syracuse University, at the school's tenth anniversary dinner, tendered by the New York Press Association on October 6. In presenting the medal to Mr. Davis, M. Lyle Spencer, Dean of the School of Journalism, pointed to Mr. Davis' "distinguished service in interpretation of science."

Three other persons received similar awards. They were Dr. George Gallup, director of the Institute of Public Opinion, Princeton, N. J., and originator of a system of public opinion statistics

known as the Gallup poll; Edward R. Murrow, chief of the London Bureau of the Columbia Broadcasting System, and dean of radio news reporters overseas; and Hanson Baldwin, military strategist and analyst for the New York Times.

The Syracuse Journalism medal has been awarded only once before, in 1936, to Frederic W. Goudy, noted type designer. Recipients are voted by the faculty of the School of Journalism, and medals are awarded only as the occasion arises.

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