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NEW MEASLES TREATMENT MAY SAVE MANY LIVES

The blood serum of adults who had measles in childhood may be used to modify the disease in children so that it will take only a mild form devoid of serious after effects and yet will give immunity for life just as the normal form of the disease does.

This is the conclusion of Prof. R. Debre and Dr. Joannon of the University of Paris Medical School reported to the Health Committee of the League of Nations. More than a thousand injections of the serum have been without any bad effects. The efforts of Dr. Leon Bernard of the University of Paris resulted in the establishment of two prophylactic stations in Paris for the treatment of the disease.

"Up to the present time," Dr. Bernard said, "prophylactic methods have been used to some extent in the United States and Germany to secure temporary immunity. A serum from convalescent cases was used and injected in patients during the first six days after infection.

"But a durable immunity may be developed if the serum is not injected until the germs have had more time to incubate, as in the modified procedure of Prof. Debre where the injections are made only between the sixth and the tenth day after infection. A serum shortage problem was solved by the discovery that the serum of adults who have long since recovered from measles was as efficient as that taken from convalescent children."

It is often forgotten, Dr. Bernard said, that measles is a serious disease to which man is universally susceptible. Every year there are thousands of deaths in France alone, and statistics from the most important countries show that the death rate from measles is falling more slowly than that of diphtheria, smallpox, scarlet fever and whooping cough.

Measles caused about a million deaths in Europe between 1900 and 1910, and in the death registration area of the United States from 1901 to 1920 there were more than 100,000 deaths. Measles is more dangerous in cities than in the country, and in Europe at any rate, the danger is directly proportioned to the density of the population, Dr. Bernard said.

Although as old as medical history, and so common that in cities over 90 per cent. of the population have had the disease by the age of eighteen, measles is still one of the mystery diseases which it has been extremely difficult to combat. It is believed to be caused by an extremely small organism which cannot be seen with the ordinary microscope, and which passes through a filter which stops ordinary germs.

With the possible exception of smallpox it is the most contagious disease known to man, and according to the U. S. Public Health Service, it is difficult to control because the symptoms of the disease are not obvious until about four days after infection.

"The importance of measles is frequently underestimated," said Dr. Victor C. Vaughan, chairman of the division of medical sciences of the National Research Council, and one of America's leading epidemiologists, "and it has been commonly believed that the disease acts as a weeding-out process to eliminate the unfit at a very early age and does no harm to the strong. On the contrary, a study of measles in the U. S. army camps during the world war revealed that a person who has recently had measles is ten times more likely to die from pneumonia than one who has not.

"It is not over-sanguine to claim," Dr. Vaughan continued, "that if this disease, together with whooping cough, diphtheria, and scarlet fever, could be entirely suppressed, the average length of life would be increased by at least ten years.

"There is great probability that the work of Drs. Bernard, Debre and Joannon will lead to an eventual control of the disease," Dr. Vaughan said.

NEW POISONS MENACE WOMEN IN INDUSTRY

A plea that the federal government should provide for study of industrial poisons, which are menacing the lives of more women workers than ever before, was made by Dr. Alice Hamilton, professor of industrial medicine at the Harvard Medical School, in a recent address before the Women's Industrial Conference.

"A great many new and more or less unfamiliar industrial poisons have come into use since the war, and each month we hear of at least one new one," said Dr. Hamilton. "This brings about a serious situation, for unless the new poisons are carefully tested on animals, the human beings who use them in trade processes will be taking the place of experimental animals.

"Unfortunately, it seems to be nobody's duty to undertake the investigation of these new dangers. In Great Britain and in Germany the Central Department of the Factory Inspection Service assumes this as one of its obvious functions, but in the United States no state department is equipped to do this. The federal government has the necessary experts in its service, but none of the bureaus has a budget which would make such investigations possible. It is hard to understand why so rich and important an industrial country as ours should show penuriousness in this particular field."