

MEDICINE

Colds Lasting Only Few Days Give Three Months Immunity

Study of Common Cold in Isolated Communities From Tropics to Arctic Disproves Widely-Held Beliefs

THE COMMON COLD lasts only three or four days. People who tell you they have "had a cold all winter" have really not been suffering from a cold but from some secondary infection, Dr. Wilson G. Smillie, professor of public health administration at Harvard University, told the Conference of State and Provincial Health Authorities of North America. Dr. Smillie's report covered studies of the common cold in four isolated communities: a "moonshine" village in southern Alabama; Labrador; Spitzbergen, the northernmost inhabited point; and the island of St. John in the Virgin Islands, which was the original of Stevenson's Treasure Island.

In all these places contact with the outside world was very limited and Dr. Smillie and associates were able to trace the course of cold epidemics from their very start. Colds are contagious and are spread by direct contact, they found. In Spitzbergen there were no colds from a period in November, soon after the last boat left, until the day after the first boat arrived the following spring. The miners in this community of 500 persons lived in very hot, humid barracks, went out into extreme cold and wind every morning, worked all day in mines where the temperature was below freezing, and came back to the hot barracks at night. Such conditions would seem ideal for the development of colds, and the fact that none developed disproves the commonly held opinion that exposure to drafts, bad weather and similar environmental factors is a cause of colds.

When the first boat arrived in May, the scientists went out to it and examined the people on it before they disembarked. One man was coming down with an acute cold. The same day the mailman from Spitzbergen went to the boat and he caught the first cold in the community. Within thirty-six to forty-eight hours the community was practically incapacitated by a severe outbreak of colds, Dr. Smillie reported. The same sort of thing was observed in the other communities. In the tropics, however, colds were very mild and

without complications such as sinus infections, bronchitis, ear infections and pneumonia. It is these complications which caused the prolonged periods of discomfort and actual illness in the temperate zones and which, except in the case of pneumonia, are generally considered the cold itself.

While colds proper last only three or four days, they seem to pave the way for these secondary infections. Likewise, one cold gives immunity for three months, Dr. Smillie said. If you have just recovered from a cold, you cannot possibly get another for three months. You can, however, have recurrences of the secondary infections, which may make you think you are having one cold right after another. The average person gets only two real colds a year.

Dr. Smillie and associates in their investigations tried to find in the noses and throats of cold patients the organism causing the cold. They were unable to find, during the first three or four days, any of the well-known germs. The agent causing colds, however, has been shown by two other groups of workers to be a filterable virus, Dr. Smillie

pointed out. Vaccines for colds are of course not made from this virus but from the germs of some of the secondary invaders. Consequently they cannot prevent the development of a cold, but it is theoretically possible for them to prevent the development of some of the secondary and equally distressing infections.

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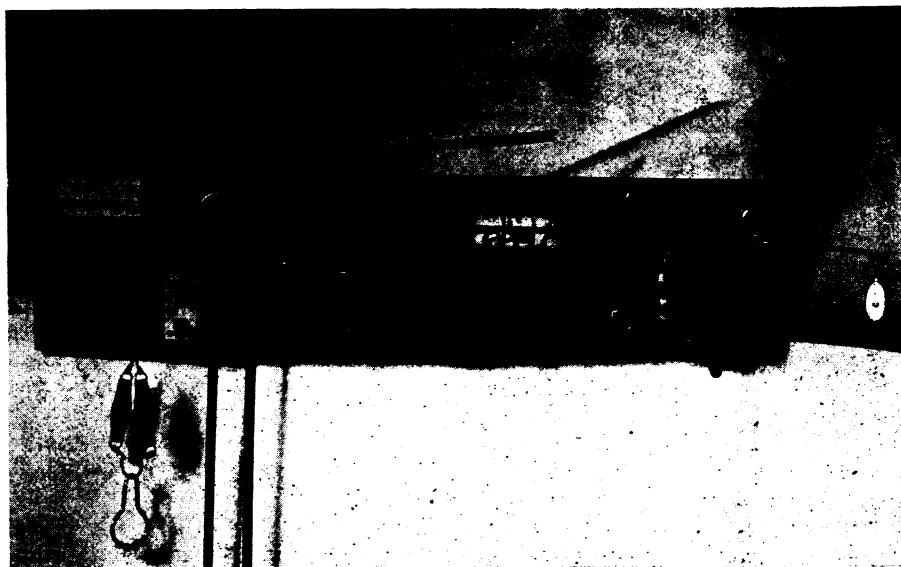
Home-Made Gymnasium For Paralysis Victims

A HOME-MADE gymnasium for exercising the fingers and arms of patients recovering from infantile or other types of paralysis has been designed by Dr. Taisia Stadnichenko of the U. S. Geological Survey. It may be made with material purchasable at any hardware or five-and-ten-cent store.

Massage is helpful to paralyzed arms and hands, but not sufficient, Miss Stadnichenko points out. The exercise board requires the use and coordination of most of the arm and hand muscles.

The board is 30 inches long, 7 inches wide and has a shelf 36 inches long. It can be clamped to a bed or table. Screwed to this board are such articles as a screen door spring, bird's cage spring, sash lock, cupboard latch, cupboard catch, barrel bolt, drawer pull, utility hook, snap switch, and knife switch. Manipulation of these common articles requires the use and control of various muscles and helps to strengthen them.

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PARALYSIS GYMNASIUM

Ten-cent store hardware supplies the articles needed for exercising muscles of patients.