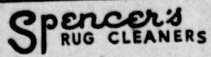




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# Measles Epidemic Could Strike Southland Again

By K. H. SUTHERLAND, M. D.  
County Health Officer

Measles occurs in all races and in all countries. It may also occur at any age, though most adults are immune to the disease as a result of having had an attack when young. Measles is the number one disease of early childhood, in terms of frequency, but it will be much less common in the future than it is today. For, at long last, vaccines are available that can prevent its occurrence.

Some 23,039 cases of measles occurred in California during 1963, and of this number, 7,865 cases, resulting in 5 deaths, were reported from Los Angeles County.

In well-populated areas, measles seems to occur in epidemic form about every two or three years. The last "measles year" in Los Angeles County was in 1961 when, by the year's end,

11,011 cases were reported with 24 deaths.

Another measles year is therefore due in this area, though its imminence is not indicated by the number of cases that have already occurred. Thus far in 1964, only 1,492 cases of measles have been reported in the County, as against 2,762 in 1963 and 4,137 in 1961. The disease occurs chiefly during spring and winter months.

Though the usual case of measles is simply a distressing illness of about 2 weeks duration, the complications that may arise, particularly encephalitis and pneumonia are very serious. For this reason, medical treatment and supervision of the disease early in the course of illness is tremendously important.

THE FIRST symptoms of

measles generally appear in about 10 days after exposure to the measles virus. Sneezing, red, watery eyes, fever, cough and a sore throat are followed in a few days by the characteristic dusky-red, blotchy measles rash. Frequently the rash starts on the face and neck, then spreads to the body, arms, and legs. Prior to the eruption, spots may be observed inside the mouth. The rash lasts about a week, and the patient is most uncomfortable during its peak. As it subsides, he feels better.

Measles is spread by the virus-laden droplets from the sick person's nose and throat secretions, by direct contact with a sick person, or indirectly through articles freshly contaminated with nose or throat secretions. The disease is highly communicable during the period of the cold-like symptoms—usually from 4 days be-

fore to 5 days after the rash appears.

VACCINATION against the disease is recommended by health officials after the age of 9 months. Vaccine is not generally given to younger infants because the passive immunity received through prenatal circulation—if the mother has had measles, that is, protects the infant against the disease.

Immunization against measles is particularly recommended for children with certain chronic diseases, including cystic fibrosis, heart disease, tuberculosis, asthma and other chronic pulmonary conditions. In fact, it is recommended for all preschoolers who have not had the disease.

There are two types of measles vaccine available: live attenuated (weakened live virus) vaccine and a killed or inacti-

ated virus product. The killed virus vaccine produces no unfavorable reactions, but has the disadvantage of producing no more than a transient immunity. A series of three injections of vaccine at monthly intervals is required for a good protection against the disease and periodic boosters are also necessary.

WHEN THE live virus measles vaccine is used, only one injection of the vaccine is required. Unfortunately, occasional reactions that occur following its administration may be severe, resembling an attack of the disease. This effect of the live virus vaccine is eliminated when it is preceded by one or two doses of killed virus vaccine, all given a month apart, or when an injection of measles gamma globulin is administered at the same

time as the vaccine. This live virus vaccine affords an excellent protection against the disease in two or three weeks following its administration and, as far as is known, provides as lasting an immunity as a case of the disease itself.

THERE ARE occasions when live attenuated virus vaccines should not be used and these include pregnancy; leukemia or some other generalized malignancy; severe febrile illness; during treatment with steroids or other substances that tend to reduce resistance, or egg sensitivity. Neither should this vaccine be given within a month of live virus polio vaccine or smallpox vaccination. Notwithstanding, the measles vaccines presently available are a big step forward in the control of the disease.

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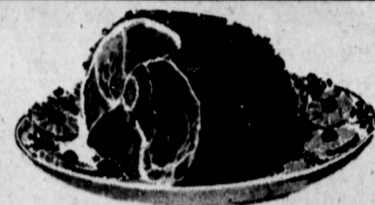
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