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Advice on Health (No. 148)

Immunisation for Diphtheria

for the Abolition of Vivisection has published an advertisement in a weekly newspaper stating that immunisation for diphtheria is without any guarantee. This is so misleading that the four points raised as non-guarantee are now answered. It is left to you to decide where the truth lies:

Point one says: "No guarantee can be given that a child will not afterwards have diphtheria. Returns given in the British House of Commons show approximately 9500 cases of diphtheria in fully immunised children between 1940 and 1943."

Point four says no guarantee can be given that treatment will cause a decline in the cases of diphtheria.

Here are the facts: In 90 per cent of children at least, protection develops slowly, and is complete in two or three months, lasting for many years. It has never been claimed that immunisation gives complete protection to every individual child. But "it's a fact that diphtheria can be defeated by a high percentage of immunisations. In Britain this question was dealt with by

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene, Health Department)

THE Secretary of the British Union the Minister of Health last September. In children protected through the State Services the incidence of diphtheria among the immunised ones was one quarter of that in the non-immunised. When you add the number of children protected by private practitioners, the ratio was about one-fifth of that in the unprotected class.

In Scotland in 1941 there were 14 times fewer cases in the immunised. In New York City diphtheria cases have fallen from nearly 10,000 annually in the nineteen-twenties to 404 in 1940. In Toronto in 1936 the ratio was 26 times more diphtheria in the nonimmunised. In Hamilton there were no cases at all in the protected children.

Point three says: "No guarantee can be given that the treatment will not upset the child. Loss of life through inoculation has occurred in various countries."

In the early years of anti-diphtheria work there were a few mistakes and troubles, but that was long ago. The days of standardised materials and safe inoculation technique have long since arrived. For many years now, hundreds

of thousands of children in many countries have been protected without mishap. In New Zealand, thousands are being protected each year, without trouble of any kind. The statement that there has been loss of life is untrue of our time. There has been no trouble anywhere in the world with modern materials and techniques. Wartime Britain has treated preventively some 4,000,000 children in about three years. There were such slight reactions that even among the older children few were upset for a single day. Not one mishap occurred among them. Babies and little children take diphtheria protection very easily indeed.

The remaining point in the misleading advertisement is: "No guarantee can be given that the immunised child will not die of the disease." Well, in Britain in 1942, the mortality ratio was calculated at one death in the immunised to 25 in the non-immunised. The Minister of Health said it was safe to conclude that the unprotected child was from 20 to 30 times as liable to die of diphtheria. In Scotland, where twothirds of the children were immunised thirds of the children were immunised in 1941, there were 418 deaths in the non-immunised, and only one in the protected. To say that immunisation doesn't protect against death is simply untrue. The League of Nations' report is that "It effects a large reduction in the diphtheria mortality and morbidity rates among children treated."



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