

ROUTINE HEALTH EXAMINATIONS

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



EVERYONE is so accustomed to the medical examination of children attending primary schools, that when groups of people do think about children's health, resolutions are very frequently passed asking for extensions. One group will want X-rays of children attending schools; another will want the examinations speeded up to annual ones, instead of the three now given—one on entrance, one halfway through primary school, and a final one during the leaving year.

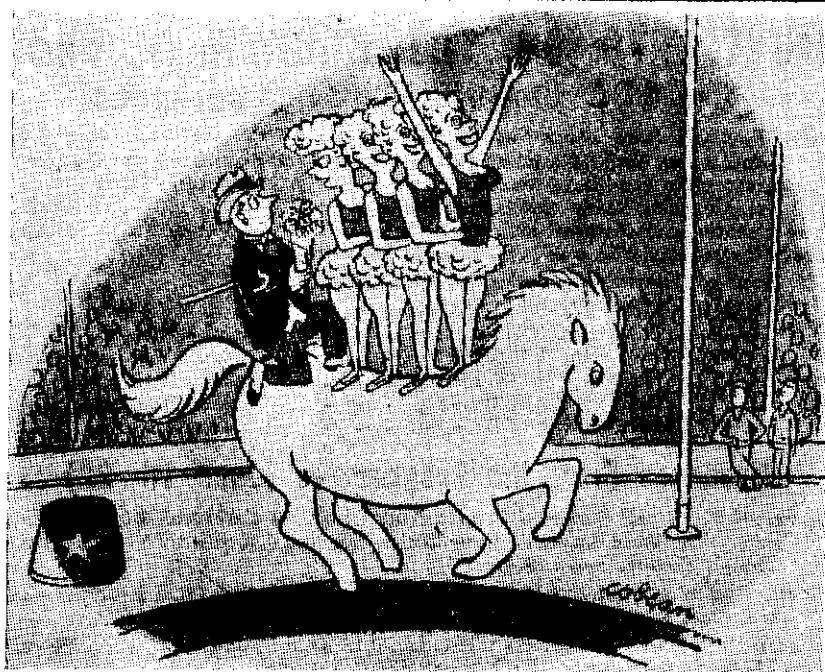
This really is quite enough to keep a general oversight of children's school health. In between doctor's visits, the school nurse visits monthly, or even more frequently sometimes, and the school nurse or teacher can refer any child requiring medical attention either to the school or family doctor. The need for X-ray examinations of chests in primary schools is limited to a few special cases that can be referred for the purpose. Universal X-rays at primary school ages would not reveal enough defects to warrant the expenditure and trouble, for chest defects are not developed at that age as a rule.

The time for a general X-ray check of the chest comes later, in the 'teen ages. Before any child leaves secondary school to enter University, to train for any technical career, to enter commerce, or take up whatever life vocation may be chosen, that child should have a thorough medical examination, including an X-ray of the chest. The child should either have a clean bill of health or a knowledge of remediable defects, before he engages in his life-work. In some cases of defect, the effect would be to

make another vocation more suitable than the one selected. Here then is a period that does need provision for routine health examinations—the middle 'teen ages—say 15 to 17 years.

There is another group in which the coverage is imperfect—toddlers and pre-school children. I would like to see every pre-school child examined once a year until the child enters primary school. I would like to see this health examination a routine for our little ones. Experience shows that a large proportion of the defects discovered in school ages could have been detected before children entered school. Think of the drag on health that could have been avoided by this earlier detection. Think, too, of the influence on national health if every mother took her child personally either to her own medical practitioner or to a pre-school medical clinic for health advice.

A start was made during the war years to provide clinics to offer health supervision for the pre-school child. The Health Department and the Plunket Society have combined in a good many places to run pre-school clinics staffed by a medical officer of the Health Department and a Plunket nurse, and using the local rooms of the Plunket Society on certain regular days. Appointments are made ahead and these clinics are well booked up and seem to be doing useful work. In addition, some departmental medical officers hold pre-school clinics at schools. The department has insufficient medical staff at the moment to make these clinics universal. You should find out whether one of these clinics is operating in your town, and if so, make an appointment for the examination of your pre-school child.



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