

# The Facts About Diphtheria

A COUPLE of months ago there was a spate of newspaper correspondence about diphtheria immunisation. It arose through the Medical Officer of Health at Invercargill giving his private opinion that parents who failed to have a child protected against diphtheria could be said to have committed legalised murder if their child should die of that disease. The reporter naturally enough made play with this provocative statement, and it was quoted up and down the country. The majority of New Zealand parents are convinced of the efficacy of immunisation against diphtheria, and a few wrote in its defence. Most of the letters were from that minority who do not mind distorting facts and misquoting medical writers, usually digging up quotations from the days before diphtheria immunisation became really effective.

A favourite device is to say that diphtheria has disappeared without immunisation, and figures before 1940 are used to support this view. It is true that diphtheria rapidly declined in the thirties without immunisation in several countries, and this led to a false sense of security. It was a reason, but not an excuse, why the even then universally accepted methods of immunisation were not used widely enough where subsequent experience showed they should have been, and were desperately needed.

This is the text of a talk on health broadcast recently from ZB, YA and YZ stations of the NZBS by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Deputy-Director-General of Health.

Just before the last World War Germany had a rising incidence of diphtheria, and this had gone on for fifteen years. At the same time diphtheria had fallen away in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland, and these countries didn't bother overmuch about immunisation. Nor did Germany! During the war Germany flared up into a quarter of a million or more diphtheria cases a year. As the German armies burst through neighbouring countries, they carried virulent diphtheria with them. In round figures, in these war years in European countries, 150,000 deaths occurred from diphtheria.

Hungary had protected itself with a regularly pursued and widely accepted vaccination campaign. Hungary escaped this European epidemic, which, in a time when some reporting would not get through, recorded officially 600,000 cases a year. Now let's look at countries that failed to immunise and therefore had populations susceptible to diphtheria. Germany took it to Norway. In six years before 1940 Norway had only



1813 cases. In the next six years over 59,000 cases occurred. Inoculations were started in 1944, and from then on cases fell away. Finland was not reached till 1943, but had had over 50,000 cases by the end of the war. Sweden hadn't bothered about immunisation and has been quoted in recent correspondence as a country that successfully got rid of diphtheria without inoculation. This is where correspondents are unfair. What happened? Diphtheria was taken to Sweden by refugees in 1942. Schick tests made among children in Stockholm gave 94 per cent non-immunes—all these children, through not having had diphtheria in the country and not having been immunised, were susceptible, and ready victims were found

among them. An epidemic began. A vaccination campaign had to be begun in 1944, and 68 per cent of Swedish children were inoculated. As always, if you can get approximately seven out of every ten children immunised, diphtheria is beaten. It was so in Sweden.

Well, there you are. So much for Sweden's boasted freedom according to correspondents who quoted facts up to but not after 1939. Denmark, too, had belatedly to get going in 1941. In Copenhagen 95 per cent of children were vaccinated in this campaign, and then the tide turned. Because many countries had failed to inoculate against diphtheria it became epidemic for five years in Europe, and it was only recourse to immunisation that beat it. Countries well immunised escaped. Others employed large-scale vaccination only in the nick of time to curb growing epidemics. I now quote the World Health Organisation, 1947: "Over a hundred thousand children cruelly and preventably killed by this disease may not impress a world hardened to holocausts... but it does bring out a response in the profession to which the responsibility in these matters has been delegated." That response, of course, has been world wide acceptance by the medical profession of the value of immunisation against diphtheria. Please play your part. See that any child of yours is protected by its first birthday, and has a booster dose on entering school.

## WHY YOUR GROWING CHILD NEEDS THIS MORE COMPLETE RELIEF FROM COLDS!

At school and at play, your child is constantly exposed to colds which can tear down resistance to dangerous childhood diseases. Neglecting any cold, or "half-treating" it, may be dangerous!

**EVERYBODY KNOWS** that a growing child needs all his strength for growing. And it is exactly during those "growing" years that strength-robbing colds are most frequent and can do the most damage. Every time your child catches cold, the nose, throat and chest—often all three—are troubled or in danger. Why take chances with "half-way" treatments that help only part of the cold? Always rub on Vicks VapoRub—the home-proved treatment that relieves nose, throat and chest all at the same time, and ends colds faster!

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When you rub Vicks VapoRub on chest, throat and back at

once a glow of warmth and comfort deep inside the sore, congested chest and irritated bronchial passages. This means that VapoRub is 'drawing out' tightness, loosening phlegm and easing congestion throughout this trouble zone. At the same time...



#### 2. Clearing the Blocked Air-passages

Medicated vapours, released from VapoRub by the body-heat are inhaled with every breath. These healing vapours clear and soothe the irritated air-passages of nose and throat. With every breath they clear out stuffiness, inflammation, and relieve coughing. This comforting double action of Vicks VapoRub keeps on fighting your child's cold through the night—bringing

relief to nose, throat and chest all at once. Often, by morning, the worst of the cold is over. Try it!

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SORE THROAT

TIGHT CHEST & COUGH



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