

LIFE'S LIKE THAT

By FRED NEHER



"I'll write our congressman, and see that we get two-pants suits back!"

### German Measles: Neither German Nor Measles

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

German measles (rubella) is a highly contagious and curiously misnamed disease that has nothing to do with measles and is not a German export. Nevertheless, because the condition was first described by a German physician over 200 years ago and because the rash sometimes resembles that of its more infectious and more prevalent namesake, the term has stuck. The disease is not usually considered dangerous unless it occurs during the first few months of pregnancy.

An attack of German measles at this period of gestation may cause congenital defects in the unborn child. As a matter of fact, it is estimated that from 10 to 20 per cent of living infants born after maternal rubella have such defects, most commonly congenital cataracts, deaf mutism, or heart disease.

**WIDESPREAD** throughout the world, the occurrence of rubella is greater during winter and spring than in other seasons. School children are the persons most often infected, but epidemics have been reported among college students and other groups of young people. After the age of 40, the risk of infection is probably negligible.

The disease is caused by the rubella virus. This infective agent is transmitted from one person to another by means of direct contact with an infected individual or by inhalation of the viruses discharged from the nose or throat. The infection may also be spread by touching articles freshly soiled with the patient's secretions.

**FOLLOWING** inoculation of the individual by the rubella virus, it takes a fortnight or longer—usually about 18 days—for signs of the disease to appear. Small pinkish-red spots, which may resemble the rash of measles or scarlet fever or a combination of both, appear first on the face and usually cover the body within 24 hours. The lymph glands back of the ear may become enlarged and there may also be a slight elevation in temperature. This acute and most contagious stage of the infection lasts about three days and no doubt accounts for the fact that the illness is sometimes called "three day measles."

As a rule, children who get rubella experience very little discomfort. Adults in whom the disorder seems to occur more frequently than does measles, are not always quite so lucky.

**THE VIRUS** responsible for German measles has recently been isolated by research workers of the National Insti-

tute of Neurological Disease and Blindness. This isolation now makes possible the development of a vaccine which, in cases of known exposure to the disease, would protect women in the critical months of early pregnancy and thus prevent the tragedy of having infants born with congenital defects due to German measles. This particular vaccine, however, is not yet available.

Medical authorities do not attempt to protect healthy children, especially girls, against exposure to the infection. One attack of the disease generally confers a life-long immunity.

**ALTHOUGH** there is some difference of opinion concerning the effectiveness of immune serum globulin, it is sometimes administered in those cases involving pregnant women who have never had the disease and who are exposed to the infection during the first three or four months of pregnancy.

No matter how light the illness, a physician should always be consulted in any case of contagious disease. And no attempt should ever be made to protect female children in good health against exposure to German measles.

Time and goodness determine greatness.—Mary Baker Eddy

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