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Influenza Reaching Epidemic Proportions in Part of Nation

In most sections of the United States a mild form of influenza, "A-prime" type, has assumed epidemic proportions. Luckily, the far west, up to the present time, has been little affected. This is not to say that no cases have occurred in California, or Los Angeles County, but what few cases have been reported recently are always to be expected at this time of the year, according to Dr. Roy O. Gilbert, Los Angeles County health officer.

It is most certainly possible that the "flu" may break out in this section of the country before winter is over, but such an occurrence cannot be predicted with any certainty whatsoever. Although it is known that influenza does spread in rapid sequence among neighboring communities, it has also been observed that intervening communities are sometimes spared. The present epidemic in Western Europe was confined for some time to Southern England and then appeared almost simultaneously in several countries on the other side of the English Channel.

Influenza, whether it appears in severe form or in mild form, is one of the most challenging problems in the field of infectious diseases. There are several reasons why this is so.

First of all much of the present-day interest and knowledge of the disease stems from a rather fearful respect for the world-wide epidemic in 1918 which snuffed out the lives of approximately 15,000,000 people. The possibility that such an epidemic could occur again is ever-present.

Another reason why influenza is of deep concern to both health authorities and the public is the fact that it appears to some extent every year, and whether its form is mild or severe, its toll in economic loss is indeed great.

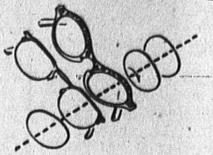
Influenza is somewhat different from other infectious diseases in that it can, within two or three weeks, spread through all age groups until 25 or 30 per cent of a local population is affected. Another distinguishing characteristic of the disease is its tendency to invade large regions, sometimes the major portions of a continent or even the world.

One of the most important steps in setting up a defense in what has proved to be a long battle of man against influenza, and which will go on for many more years to come, was the isolation of the specific germ (several strains of a virus) which causes the disease. It is this discovery that made it possible to specifically diagnose the various types of influenza.

Continued research has now made it possible to compare a laboratory finding in one part

are being given in the armed services of many nations. Since influenza is a world-wide disease and since laboratory aids are now available in most places, the World Health Organization has now set up an influenza center in London to study and analyze the various aspects of influenza as it occurs throughout the world. The United States is cooperating in the study. The Public Health Service and the Armed Forces are now sending specimens to seven regional laboratories in the United States and one in Puerto Rico.

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