

# Study Reveals TB Now Hitting Older Persons

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**LEONARDS**

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

It is not so long ago that tuberculosis was one of the leading causes of death in the United States, and the preponderance of those persons stricken were young adults. Though modern treatment has caused a large decrease in the mortality of the disease in all age groups, the greatest reduction has taken place in young people. Now, attention is focused on older persons who are the chief reservoirs of the organisms that cause the disease.

Age group comparisons of

patients admitted to the Los Angeles County Olive View tuberculosis hospital between 1950 and 1960 indicate some local changes in the occurrence of tuberculosis which, incidentally, agree in trend with similar figures in age group studies from other parts of the country.

THIS STUDY reveals that older persons (50 to 89) compose the group which increase in size in relation to all the patients at Olive View during the 10-year period. This supports existing evidence that a general shift has occurred in

the tuberculosis attack rate of different age groups within the population, and the young adult is no longer the commonest victim of tuberculosis. Indeed, so striking is the reversal that the atmosphere of tuberculosis hospitals has entirely changed. A decade or so ago, the visitor was impressed with the number of young people who were tuberculosis patients, and who imported, as it were, a feeling of youthfulness to the surroundings. Now the reverse is true, as there are just as many patients in the hospital above the age of 50 as there are below it. When

the age was dropped to 40, according to the Olive View Study, about 65 per cent of the patients were included in the older age group.

ON THE AVERAGE, therefore, the percentage increase of tuberculosis in the age group at the end of the life span more than doubled, and similar increases have been noted throughout the United States.

Many, if not most, of the older persons with active tuberculosis acquire the initial infection years or decades prior to the appearance of symptoms

of illness. They may be completely unaware of it or the disease may have been treated many years before and declared arrested or inactive. They forget, or do not know, that any time the body's defenses are weakened the disease can be reactivated.

MOREOVER, for all practical purposes, the chronic pulmonary type of tuberculosis is the only form of the disease that is infectious, and this happens to be the one that is most commonly found in the older individual.

In those cases where the disease becomes active, there are rarely any definite symptoms in the beginning stages of illness. Those that may be experienced such as prolonged tiredness, indigestion, and loss of weight can be attributed to many causes.

The bodies of many older people may therefore be considered as reservoirs of the tubercle bacilli. From these storehouses of infection the disease organisms are transmitted to others, and particularly to very young children in the household who are so susceptible to the infection.

HEALTH departments and tuberculosis associations are now understandably concentrating case finding efforts in those areas where the incidence of tuberculosis is highest and in those age groups where the disease is actually on the increase. In these cases, it is important to find tuberculosis early and begin treatment promptly. It is even more important to prevent its occurrence.

A pamphlet giving additional information on tuberculosis will be mailed to anyone who sends a card of request to the Division of Health Education, Los Angeles County Health Department, 241 N. Figueroa St., Los Angeles 12.

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An Oneg Shabbat, will be held by Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Rosen and Mr. and Mrs. Harold Mirels following the service.

Services begin at 8:30 p.m. and are held at the Redonda Women's Club, 400 S. Broadway, Redondo Beach.

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