

Improvements in health conditions have affected people of all ages, though the greatest impact has been made on health of infants and youths. For some younger age groups death rates have dropped by more than two-thirds during the past quarter-century; gains made in older age groups have been much more modest. During the twenty-year period up to 1951 life expectancy at birth for males rose from 60 to 66 years and for females from 62 to 71 years. Average age at death, a cruder index of the life span, in the thirty-year period up to 1956 advanced for males from 40 to 58 years and for females from 42 to 61 years.

Some improvements in health can be directly related to specific public health measures, others to general advances in medical care. Well established community procedures like chlorination of water supplies, pasteurization of milk, sanitary disposal of sewage and health inspection of food handling have done much to reduce the incidence of typhoid fever and other water and food-borne infections. Vaccination has eliminated smallpox from Canada, though as recently as 1928 over three thousand cases of smallpox were reported in this country.

The extensive development of antibiotics and other prophylactic agents such as poliomyelitis vaccine has served to reduce the severity or the degree of disability caused by many primary infections and to provide protection against secondary infection. In 1956 only 1.8 p.c. of all deaths were due to infectious diseases, including tuberculosis; thirty years ago infectious disease accounted for 12.6 p.c. of deaths. Similar decreases in deaths have occurred in other diseases such as rheumatic fever and pneumonia where infection plays a part in other disease processes.

But, while many of man's oldest diseases are being controlled, the nature and cure of chronic and degenerative illness remain too largely unknown, and new sources of ill health are emerging from the complex development of industrial civilization. In this country and elsewhere occupational hazards from toxic substances and accidents have become a matter of increasing concern. The contamination of air and water for the community from industrial wastes becomes a progressively more severe problem. Accidents are assuming an alarming position among the leading causes of death, vehicular and other traffic accidents resulting in a tragic mounting loss of life. The rapid development of urban living has also created many other problems related to health. Inadequate housing and recreation facilities, excessive use of alcohol, drug addiction, and juvenile delinquency are special urban problems. Increasing use of radioactive agents in many different fields of endeavour requires special health precautions and the general problem of the effects of radiation on life is one of the most important and pressing of today.

*Health of Mothers and Children.*—Continuing high fertility produced a record of 450,000 births in Canada in 1956, but the 1956 infant mortality rate of 32 still stands far above the Swedish and Netherlands rates of 17 and 19 deaths per thousand live births. Of the 14,399 infants who died during their first year, nearly two-thirds of deaths occurred during the first 28 days of life. Immaturity, congenital malformations and birth injury continued to be the leading causes of infant deaths. For mothers, 278 deaths in 1956 established a new low rate of maternal mortality, approximately one-tenth the rate 25 years ago. Regional differences continue to affect the national picture of maternal and infant deaths.

*Health of Young People.*—Following the first year of life survival rates are high throughout childhood. Although more than one-third of the population are between one and 20 years of age, they account for only one of every 25 deaths. Accidents account for the largest number of deaths in childhood, principally traffic casualties and drownings. Respiratory and digestive disorders are also leading causes of death.

Despite the relatively low number of deaths, sickness rates in childhood remain high. The Canadian Sickness Survey of 1951 showed that 87 p.c. of children under 15 reported sickness and 57 p.c. reported time spent sick in bed. Each child suffered an average of three sicknesses a year, a sickness lasting 12 days on the average. Colds and influenza which are rife at all ages were a leading cause of sickness. The communicable diseases