

1944
NEW ZEALAND

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF HEALTH

Presented in pursuance of Section 100 of the Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Act, 1926

HON. A. H. NORDMEYER, MINISTER OF HEALTH REPORT

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF HEALTH TO THE HON. THE MINISTER OF HEALTH, WELLINGTON.
I HAVE the honour to lay before you the annual report of the Department for the year 1943-44.

INTRODUCTION

The outstanding features of 1943 in comparison with the preceding year were a fall in the birth-rate and in the death-rate, a rise in the infant-mortality rate, and a still further improvement in the maternal-mortality rate and the death-rate from tuberculosis. There was a widespread outbreak of scarlet fever which still continues and an increased prevalence of diphtheria. There was an increased incidence of poliomyelitis, but, on the other hand, cerebro-spinal fever showed a marked decline.

VITAL STATISTICS

(Exclusive of Maoris)

Population.—The mean population of the Dominion in 1943 was estimated to be 1,538,651.

Birth-rate.—There were 30,311 births in 1943, representing a rate of 19.70 per 1,000 mean population. The rate in 1942 was 21.73.

Death-rate.—The death-rate in 1943 was 10.04 per 1,000 mean population, as compared with a rate of 10.60 in the preceding year.

Infant Mortality.—The infant-mortality rate was 31.37 per 1,000 live births. In 1942 the rate was 28.71.

Still-births.—The still-birth rate was 26.25 per 1,000 live births, as compared with 26.54 in 1942.

Maternal Mortality.—The maternal-mortality rate, including deaths from septic abortion, was 2.21 per 1,000 live births, as compared with 2.53 in 1942. When deaths from septic abortion were deducted, the maternal-mortality rate was 1.71 (1.73 in 1942).

INFECTIOUS AND OTHER DISEASES

(Exclusive of Maoris, unless otherwise stated)

Five thousand eight hundred and thirty cases of notifiable diseases were reported. This substantial increase on the previous year's figure of 4,372 is accounted for in large part by an extensive outbreak of scarlet fever and an increased incidence of diphtheria and poliomyelitis.

Scarlet Fever.—Notifications of scarlet fever rose steeply from 457 in 1942 to 1,196 in 1943. This is the highest number of notifications since 1931, when 1,304 cases were reported. The indications are that 1944 will show a further marked increase in incidence. The last big epidemic of scarlet fever occurred in 1928 (6,123 cases) and 1929 (4,844 cases).

The relative immunity of the Maori to scarlet fever is shown by the fact that in 1943 only 1 case of scarlet fever was reported in the Maori population.

Diphtheria.—Diphtheria also showed an increase in 1943, 830 cases being notified, as compared with 542 in 1942. There were 32 deaths, giving a death rate of 0.21 per 1,000 of mean population. For twelve years notifications have been below a thousand each year, and in 1940 reached the low level of 367. The last major epidemic of this disease occurred in 1917 (5,458 cases) and 1918 (5,539 cases).

It is to be hoped that parents will avail themselves of the opportunities for immunization of pre-school and school children offered by the Department. Experience in other countries has shown that diphtheria can be controlled, if not eradicated, in this way. The chance of contracting the disease and of a fatal termination if the disease is contracted are markedly reduced by immunization.