

THE MEDICAL STATE OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Health oversight of pre-school children is achieved in three ways: through Plunket Clinics, where the departmental medical officer works with the Plunket Nurse; through pre-school clinics on school premises; and at kindergartens; the last two types of clinics being attended by departmental doctors and District Nurses.

Number of children seen	7,121
Number of defects found—	
Anæmia	599
Uncleanliness	20
Subnormal nutrition	541
Protuberant abdomen	183
Posture defective	167
Deformities—	
Chest	117
Legs	531
Feet	670
Skin-diseases	288
Heart: Organic disease	59
Lungs	65
Dental—	
Gums and soft tissues	42
Dental caries	1,210
Nose and throat—	
Adenoids	237
Tonsils	714
Goitre	19
Eyes—	
External disease	64
Defective vision	38
Ears—	
Otorrhœa	17
Deafness	15
Phimosis	33
Undescended testicles	124
Hernia	36
Habit abnormalities—	
Bad food habits	568
Other bad habits	326
Bowel action abnormality	93
Eneuresis	350
Insufficient daytime rest	345
Insufficient sleep	249

In the pre-school children there is a welcome trend in better nutrition, 7.59 per cent. subnormal, as compared with the previous year, 8.80 per cent. That there is still wrong feeding in pre-school children is confirmed by the 8.41 per cent. of anæmia found. Poor posture has improved from the 4.71 per cent. in 1946 to 2.34 per cent., and this is probably a reflection of the improved nutrition and sleep and rest figures. There is a reduction in skin-diseases to 3.52 per cent. from 5.07 per cent. in 1946. There is far too much dental caries in this age group. It is imperative to keep the first teeth in good order if well-spaced good second sets are wanted, hence there is urgent need for the speeding-up of dental-clinic coverage of the pre-school child. There is a welcome fall in bad habits from last year's figures, bad food habits falling from 10.01 per cent. to 7.97 per cent. this year, and other behaviour abnormalities from 6.74 per cent. to 4.58 per cent. There is also improvement in adequate daytime rest, insufficiency of same being 4.84 per cent., as against 5.04 per cent., in 1946, and in night-time sleep, admitted lack of same falling from 4.43 per cent. in 1946 to 3.49 per cent. this year.

Environment influences the pre-school child's welfare and makes the parents' task more difficult. Dr. Buchler reports:—

A noticeable finding in the pre-school medical examination was the association of bad housing conditions—overcrowding, living in flats, &c.—with complaints of anorexia, lassitude, constipation, and behaviour problems. The children receive inadequate fresh air, exercise, and rest, and the multiple control exercised where families are living with grandparents is responsible for many psychological problems.