

I have to acknowledge, on behalf of the school medical staff, the cordial assistance of the school-teachers in facilitating the work of school medical inspection. Moreover, both in regard to the cleanliness of the children and in seeing that the school medical officers' recommendations are carried out, the active co-operation of the teachers is invaluable. The standard of cleanliness and the attention given by the children to the care of their teeth are frequently the direct reflection of the degree of keenness exhibited by the school-teacher in regard to these important matters.

RETURNS OF MEDICAL INSPECTION.

A total of 1,452 schools have been inspected during the year, and this number includes all the larger primary schools in the Dominion. Statistical returns have been sent in relating to the complete examination of 58,451 school-children. In addition between fifty thousand and sixty thousand children have been examined for the more important defects, records of which have not been tabulated statistically. Those to whom the following percentages refer include children of all ages in the primary schools, with a predominance of those of the earlier school-going years. The percentages are based upon the combined returns of the staff, but it should be borne in mind that as some of the figures are to an extent dependent upon individual judgment the percentages given should therefore be taken as broad indications rather than exact estimates.

Of the children examined 85.6 per cent. were returned as having medical defect of some kind. The proportion of children found to have defects other than dental caries is 56.8 per cent. It should be mentioned that this figure is not of great value for comparison with other countries, as there is no internationally recognized standard as to what should be included in the category of medical defect. The standard adopted by school medical officers in New Zealand is high.

Impaired nutrition was found present in 5.76 per cent. This refers to thinness and underweight, and is undoubtedly a low estimate of the proportion of children below the accepted standard weight for height, as some medical officers have attached less importance to weight as an index of health and development.

A *verminous condition of the hair* was present in 2.3 per cent., and *skin-disease* in 2.66 per cent. Less than 1 per cent. showed signs of *abnormality of the heart*, and a proportion of these cases would not be of a serious nature.

Deformity of the trunk and chest was recorded in 25 per cent. of the children examined. Some comment upon the significance of this item is perhaps desirable. Included in this category are stooped shoulders, spinal curvature, and other forms of faulty posture, as well as actual structural deformity of the chest-wall, such as pigeon breast and depressed ribs. Faulty posture, being largely due to weakness and deficient tone of the muscles, often represents an impaired state of nutrition and actual predisposition to disease. Structural chest-deformity, whether or not it is due to rickets in early childhood, certainly indicates that there has been a serious interference with normal development, and this interference has almost certainly affected vitality and growth in other ways as well. Even allowing for a proportion of these cases of postural and structural defect being of a slight degree and not incompatible with robust health, I think that their occurrence to the extent of 25 per cent. is a matter which should not be regarded lightly.

Faulty development of the jaws, as manifested in irregularity and crowding of the teeth, in narrowness of the jaws and high arching of the palate, was recorded in 9.18 per cent. This faulty development of the jaws appears to be on the increase amongst the more civilized communities of the world, and, along with the chest-deformities already referred to, should be viewed with concern.

Dental decay has been recorded in 67.37 per cent. of the children examined, but it should be pointed out that this figure refers only to those children with untreated decay, and does not include those whose mouths have received adequate treatment by fillings or extractions. A truer estimate of the prevalence of dental decay is given by a consideration of the percentage of children having perfect sets of teeth—i.e., with no decay, no extractions, and no fillings—complete naturally sound sets. It is too soon to be able to state this figure with precision, but it is probably well below 5 per cent. for children within the primary-school age-period.

Obstructed nasal breathing, associated in the majority of cases with adenoids, was reported in 3.7 per cent. This figure refers only to those cases in which there was evidence at the time of the examination of an appreciable degree of obstruction being present, and does not, of course, give any idea of the prevalence of catarrhal trouble associated with adenoids.

Enlargement of the tonsils was recorded in 13 per cent.; and, while it is probably true that any degree of enlargement is abnormal, yet a portion only of these cases would call for radical treatment. *Enlarged glands in the neck*—due in the majority of cases to septic absorption from decayed teeth, adenoids, and unhealthy tonsils—was recorded in 10.4 per cent.

Taking the figures for all districts, the percentage for *goitre* is 7.7 per cent. As the prevalence of goitre varies enormously in different districts, this figure has little meaning without comparative returns for each locality. It would, however, be misleading to publish such figures until arrangements can be made for a more exact standard of examination, as the estimates of different medical officers would not be truly comparative so long as differences in individual judgment and method are an appreciable factor.

External eye-disease was present in 1 per cent. of cases, consisting chiefly of inflammatory conditions of the eyelids. *Defective vision* was detected in 4 per cent. of those examined, which is undoubtedly an underestimate of the actual defect existing, as in the case of children of the primer classes (who formed a large proportion of those examined and in whom defective vision is not so common) it is rarely practicable to test vision systematically. In the records of the examination of children of Standard II in previous years 10 per cent. have been noted as suffering from defective vision.