

The functions of the Department of Health are set out in section 12 of the Health Act, which reads as follows:—

“12. *Functions of Department of Health.*—The functions of the Department of Health shall be—

- “(a) To administer this Act and all other public Acts in so far as their purpose is the promotion of health :
- “(b) To advise local authorities in matters relating to public health in so far as those local authorities are charged with the care of the public health by this or any other Act :
- “(c) The prevention, limitation, and suppression of infectious and other diseases :
- “(d) To promote or carry out researches and investigations in relation to matters concerning the public health, and the prevention or treatment of disease :
- “(e) To publish reports, information, and advice concerning the public health :
- “(f) The organization and control of medical, dental, and nursing services, so far as such services are paid for out of public moneys.
- “(g) Generally, to take all such steps as may be desirable to secure the preparation, effective carrying-out, and co-ordination of measures conducive to the public health.”

The staff of the Department includes the Director-General of Health, Directors of the Divisions of Public Hygiene, Hospitals, Nursing, Maternal Welfare, School Hygiene, and Dental Hygiene, and such number of Medical Officers of Health, Inspectors of Health, medical practitioners, nurses, and other officers as may be required. The Divisional Directors at headquarters work through and with the Medical Officers of Health.

The Dominion is divided into thirteen health districts, each of which is under the charge of a Medical Officer of Health. These officers who are medical practitioners with special qualifications in sanitary science, are responsible for the due observance of all enactments and regulations relating to public health, and act as advisers of the local governing bodies in matters affecting public health. Thus they are in charge of measures relating to quarantine, infectious diseases, housing, water-supplies, drainage, the provision of pure food, &c., and exercise a general control and supervision over all branches of departmental activity.

The work of the various Divisions of the Department may now be touched in more detail:—

(a) *The Division of Public Hygiene.*

The functions of this division, which has as its Director a medical practitioner with special qualifications in sanitary science, include the supervision of those activities which relate to public health in the more restricted sense of that term—viz., public water-supplies, drainage, refuse-removal, housing, control of infectious diseases and industrial diseases, quarantine, the purity of food and drugs, and control of offensive trades. While the Health Act throws on the local governing bodies the responsibility of providing certain fundamental health services, it recognizes that these bodies in a young, growing country such as New Zealand are for the greater part not yet strong enough to provide all the machinery required for securing the best results. For this reason the Medical Officers of Health act as advisers of the local bodies, although not actually their officers. Certain duties remain wholly under the control of the Health Department. These duties are chiefly the control of infectious diseases, the quarantine of overseas ships, and securing the purity of food and drugs.

Infectious Diseases.—The Health Act deals specifically with three classes of disease in regard to which medical practitioners and others have certain duties. These classes are—

- Notifiable infectious diseases.
- Non-notifiable infectious diseases.
- Notifiable non-infectious diseases.

A schedule of those different classes is gazetted and can be altered from time to time by the Governor-General in Council.

In regard to notifiable infectious diseases, the duty of notification of its occurrence rests primarily on the medical practitioner, a fee being payable therefor. Power to enter premises on suspicion of the existence of notifiable disease is given to the Medical Officer of Health, who may order the removal of the patient to a hospital. In regard to all infectious disease, the Act provides penalties against those who do not take due precaution to prevent the spread of the disease.

Extensive regulations have been gazetted for the conservation and promotion of public health. Under these regulations the duties of medical practitioners, Inspectors of Health, and undertakers are defined in regard to notifications, and the measures to be taken in the event of outbreaks of certain diseases and the occurrences of epidemics are set out.

Quarantine.—Power is given to proclaim places of inspection quarantine grounds and quarantine stations. Quarantine stations have been established at Auckland and Wellington.

Food and Drugs.—The sale of food and drugs and their inspection is dealt with under the Sale of Food and Drugs Act and the Health Act. The former Act provides for the analysis by the Public Analyst of any article of food or drink or of any drug, which may be sold, offered for sale, or exposed for sale, or for inspection of any place where there is any food or drug intended for sale. Regulations are provided for the prevention of adulteration of food, drink, or drugs and for the inspection of places where such things are manufactured and packed.