

NUTRITION.

The rate of subnormal nutrition in New Zealand children has in the last few years shown a decrease, but this year a slight increase is shown over last year's figure, the figure for 1937 being 3.52 per cent. and that for 1938 being 4.37 per cent. The difference may be accounted for by the fact that this year has been considered by School Medical Officers and teachers to be one of the worst in their experience in respect of school attendance; infectious diseases, particularly measles, influenza, coughs, and colds reduced school attendance in certain classes to less than half its usual number, and many children returned to school pale and debilitated. Nor must we forget that in former years the staff of School Medical Officers remained fairly constant working year after year in the same district, whereas this year there have been many changes in the personnel of the examining officers, and it is recognized that the personal factor is a big one in determining degrees of nutrition. Therefore it is not considered that the slight increase this year should be taken as an indication that the nutrition of New Zealand children is deteriorating.

School Medical Officers continue to pay special attention to subnormal nutrition and endeavour to keep before parents the essentials for optimum nutrition. All reports contain special reference to this subject, of which the following are extracts:—

Dr. McLagan.—"There is scope for extensive work on the study of causes of malnutrition. Apart from obvious defects (such as septic tonsils) when such generally recognized factors as irregular life, insufficient or injudicious feeding, lack of sleep, of fresh air, of bathing, removal from unhappy or too fussy domestic atmosphere, are eliminated as at a health camp, the majority, especially the youngest ones, respond immediately. But there is a residue that does not respond; there is scope for research in this residue. Such conditions as latent T.B., chronic appendicitis, or pyelitis must first be eliminated."

Dr. Champaloup (Wellington).—"A considerable amount of poor nutrition exists in this district, which appears unfavourably in comparison with some other areas. It was noted in 1937 that Wellington Central compared unfavourably with other school districts controlled from this office (including Hawke's Bay, Wanganui, and Nelson). This view is supported by the more debilitated appearance of Wellington children at Otaki Health Camp in comparison with admissions from other districts. There is a preponderance of boys over girls in the applications for admission to the health camp, applications being received for 151 boys and 119 girls. This discrepancy raised the question as to the relative standard of nutrition in the sexes. Accordingly statistics have been kept separately for boys and girls. These are available for a limited number only, but serve to indicate that girls show some superiority. Returns on the medical examination of 2,700 children in the Wellington district are as follows:—

						Boys (1,350). Per Cent.	Girls (1,350). Per Cent.
"(1) Superior	..	..	..	..	..	13.0	19.2
"(2) Average	..	..	..	..	..	75.7	73.3
"(3) Poor	..	..	..	..	..	11.2	6.8
"(4) Excess	..	..	..	..	..	0.6	0.6

"These figures, pointing to a poorer state of nutrition amongst boys, are an indication for further inquiry, and suggest the desirability of allocating a higher proportion of health-camp accommodation for the use of boys."

Dr. Dawson (New Plymouth), writes: "In spite of a severe epidemic of measles, there is an improvement in the nutrition of the children, which is attributed to the supply of milk. Children supplied with milk no longer make inroads into their lunch at playtime, at lunch-time consuming a full lunch instead of the fragments left over from playtime."

Dr. Mary Wilson (Auckland).—"There is still too large a percentage of children having a diet containing excess carbohydrate and partial deficiency vitamins, but I consider that each year there is a gradual improvement and more families are realizing the importance of proper food. The correct food does not depend upon the income of the family as much as upon the knowledge of the parents in regard to food values. There is still a large proportion of parents who have the knowledge of food values, but fail to realize the importance of those values in every-day routine."

Dr. Helen Deem (Hamilton) gives a table showing the nutrition of 3,060 children and shows that 2,656, or 86.6 per cent., are normal, and adds that this finding does not necessarily mean that the existing nutrition could not be improved by better feeding, better home management, better school furniture and less crowding in the schools, and a better system of physical education. She found that share-milkers' children compared unfavourably with other country children.

An investigation is being made by the Medical Research Council of New Zealand into the vitamin content of New Zealand foodstuffs, and the result of their investigations will add considerably to our knowledge of the value of our diet.