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POLIO:

HAVE NO FEAR OF THAT JAB

THIS is the polio season.

A few years ago, at this time of the year, many children would die from this terrible illness, and many of the survivors are still alive only because of artificial aids.

But for some years now there has been a vaccine available against the scourge, although it is still ignored by a large sector of the population.

The risks from disease are not to be trifled with. How it enters the body; indeed, how it acts are not known to science.

Some recent advances in research have shown that there is even more mystery about the disease.

For instance, it has been shown that perfectly healthy children may excrete the virus, but no-one could explain how this can be.

Progress in research is proceeding at a fast rate. Only a few years ago, the virus,

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which is one of the smallest known, had been seen on the electron microscope to be about as big as a pinhead.

Now, under enormous magnifications of about half-a-million it can be seen quite clearly and the actual molecules of protein of which it is made can also be seen!

So clear

The protograph shows a virus very similar to that causing polio; the structure of each particle can be clearly made out.

Making a vaccine proved to be technically difficult. But it has been recently found possible to grow the virus in cultures of kidney tissue taken from monkeys and grown in incubated bottles.

In these cells the virus grows rapidly and can be "harvested" with ease. Next, it has to be presented to the body in a form that will be taken for the infective virus, and yet which will be quite harmless.

Obviously this means that the virus will have to be inactivated in some way.

Such a method as killing by heat would distort the viruses' shape so it is now killed by adding a little formalin to the virus solution.

I say "a little" with some reservation, for the amount has to be carefully controlled in order to prove effective. But there are three types of polio virus, and the vaccine prepared in this way, and given by injection, sometimes did not make the recipient fully immune.

Foolproof

For this reason research has continued, and culminated in the production of an orally-administered drug, the Sabin vaccine. This is now generally available, having been tested extensively both at home and abroad.

It is now known that, not only is the Sabin vaccine fool-proof but it gives almost certain immunity to poliomyelitis.

Though the disease is probably far less ineffective than smallpox, since some people who have been in contact fail to become ill, whereas others in the most obscure places become infected, it is, I think, far more terrible in its effects.

And the risks from polio vaccination are nil, whereas even smallpox vaccine has a very small risk of complication.

If by this time of year you are still unprotected you would be very wise to consider vaccination against polio in the near future — indeed, the sooner the better.