PUBLIC HEALTH

Every year a certain period seems to be marked out as the open season for colds. And the remarkable thing is that this belief is not a popular superstition, but a fact.

There are few individuals who do not suffer from colds or influenza at least once a year. Causes that may play a rôle in the chilling of the people in the summer and other uninitiated groups, are always with us, yet nothing is done to remedy that state of affairs. These respiratory troubles are spoken of as "minor ailments," and comparatively little definite knowledge exists in regard to their real causes.

The immediate cause or manner of spread. Diseases with spectacular names may be more sudden and dangerous in effect, but they are confined, relatively, to a very small number of persons. But here are ailments anyone is liable to contract, and often bring about more serious disease.

There is another important fact to be considered—the effect on industry. The proportion of lost time that is due to sickness is, as a rule, greatly underestimated in factory records, and the proportion due to slackness over-estimated. Though no records are available, it is probable that the greatest percentage of lost time due to sickness is caused through respiratory troubles, especially when the period of sick leave is of comparatively short duration.

In the United States this year a detailed study of common colds will be begun by the Public Health Service in cooperation with the following noted universities: Harvard, Johns Hopkins Medical School, Georgetown, Howard, Tulane, Ohio State, Chicago, and California. It is estimated that the research will extend over a period of two or three years.

Co-operation in, and facilities for, scientific research are the attributes of the American scientific association which might well be copied by Australia, especially in regard to the bolstering up of public health. Investigations into various diseases have, no doubt, been undertaken in Australia by private individuals, medical men mainly and Government officials, but there has been nothing like an organized attack on the world of germs.

There are six excellent universities in the Commonwealth. If all these worked in co-operation with public health bodies on some common subject of research, it is certain that present health problems would not present so difficult an aspect. Nor would the fear of epidemics be so great, because there would exist a mechanism of investigation and prevention.

Australia needs co-operation in other lines than ensuring health, but nowhere is the need so great. Physical fitness is the basis of moral, industrial, and national progress. Why not take the pains to ensure it?