



Bulletin No. 21  
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Hepatitis Epidemic in Kotzebue

Since August 27, 101 cases of infectious hepatitis have occurred in the Kotzebue area. 47 cases in Kotzebue, 20 in Pt. Hope, 16 in Noatak, 13 in Kivalina and 5 in Selawik. All cases with four exceptions have been in children under the age of 17. The disease has been generally mild, usually lasting several days and characterized by loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Usually, there is scleral icterus. The fact that young children are primarily involved strongly suggests that the adult population has protection to hepatitis from prior exposure to the disease.

While it is impossible to pinpoint the exact source of the outbreak, some evidence suggests, it was first introduced in Kivalina probably from Barrow and then spread to Kotzebue and to the remaining villages. Inadequate sanitary facilities have contributed to if not caused, the disease spreading from child to child and household to household. We would anticipate the occurrence of additional cases in all five locations lasting for several more months. In addition, the disease may likely spread to other villages. Family members of cases are being protected with immune serum globulin. It is anticipated that colder weather will contribute to a decline in the number of cases.

(Reported by Jay Caldwell, MD, Phyllis Ryan, RN, Hazel Strubeck, PHN and Don Payne, PHS Sanitarian)

### **Salmonella in Turtles**

Human salmonellosis contracted from turtles has been repeatedly documented. An estimated 1,000 cases and some deaths occur annually in the United States. Widespread infection has prompted State and Federal regulations requiring that only turtles certified salmonella free by the state of origin may be shipped across state lines. Nonetheless, these regulations have not been effective as many lots of turtles certified salmonella free have been found, in fact, to be infected at the time of arrival. Recently, in Anchorage, a batch of pet turtles was found to be infected with Arizona' organisms. (Arizona and salmonella organisms are bacteriologically very similar organisms). A woman purchasing one of these pet turtles did develop salmonellosis. It is fair to say that no method has yet been developed to assure turtles being salmonella free at the time of arrival. One must assume that any turtle used as a pet is a potential source of salmonella or Arizona organisms. We would urge that turtles not be kept as pets.

### **Alaska Number One Again**

Alaska has the dubious distinction of once again having the highest rate of gonorrhea in the nation. In calendar year 1973, 2,766 cases of gonorrhea were reported in Alaska. This represents a rate of 913 per 100,000 or slightly less than 1% of the population. This is the highest rate reported in the nation and over twice the national rate of 405 per 100,000 population. During 1972, Alaska's rate was the second highest in the nation, taking second place to South Carolina. So move over, South Carolina.