

## London's Health in 1954.

THE "REPORT OF THE County Medical Officer of Health and Principal School Medical Officer for 1954" has been published by the London County Council and reference is made in the following notes to some of the more interesting information which it contains.

### Vital Statistics.

(a) *Population*—The estimated population in the middle of the year was 3,322,000, a decrease of 21,000 as compared with the previous year. The average age of the population was 37.4 years and 11.6 per cent. were 65 years of age or over.

(b) *Births*—The number of live births was 50,630 and the birth rate was 15.2 per thousand of the population compared with 15.3 in 1953 and 1952, 15.6 in 1951, 15.7 in 1950 and 13.4 in 1938. The birth rate, though well in excess of the pre-war and early war years would appear to have stabilised at a little below the average of the last 21 years. Of the total live births, 7.2 per cent. were illegitimate. Since 1948 the stillbirth rate has remained relatively stable and in 1954 there were 19.8 stillbirths per 1,000 total births.

(c) *Marriages*—The number of marriages registered in London in 1954 was 32,876 or 19.8 persons married per 1,000 of the total population.

(d) *Deaths*—Since 1951 there has been a steady decline in the death rate to the lowest figure ever recorded in London of 10.7 per 1,000 of the population in 1954. Heart disease, the major cause of death, accounted for nearly one-third of the mortality and, although the death rate from cancer showed a slight decrease from 2.34 per 1,000 in 1953 to 2.31 per 1,000 in 1954, it remained the second leading cause of death (a detailed examination of the course of lung cancer in London over the last 25 years appears as an Appendix to the Report). The death rate for the bronchitis and pneumonia group fell sharply from 1.71 per 1,000 in 1953 to 1.14 per 1,000 in 1954. The degenerative diseases, namely, heart disease, other circulatory diseases, cerebral vascular lesions, nephritis and bronchitis, continue to be responsible for over half the deaths. There was an increase in the number of fatalities from "violence," which constituted the sixth leading cause of death; one out of every 24 deaths occurring was attributable to this cause, i.e., accidents in the home and on the road, industrial accidents, suicides, etc., and there was a total of 1,201 deaths from these causes in 1954. The report gives interesting statistics relating to the loss of years of "working life" (taken as ages 15-64 years) per 10,000 total population for certain diseases, which shows that the greatest loss of working life is caused by diseases of early infancy, followed by cancer, diseases of the heart, violent causes and pneumonia and bronchitis.

The deaths of children under one year continue to decline and reached the lowest recorded figure of 20.7 per 1,000 live births, as compared with 23.9 per 1,000 live births in 1953. Of these, 15.1 occurred in the first four weeks of life, which was also a record low figure and compared with 17.8 for England and Wales.

The total number of women who died as a result of pregnancy or child-birth (including post-abortion deaths) was 34, compared with 37 in 1953, 50 in 1952 and 42 in 1951.

### Infectious Diseases.

The number of cases of diphtheria continues to decline and in 1954 there were only four confirmed notifications of the disease and no deaths. There was a smaller incidence of whooping cough (4,691) than for some years past and there were only four deaths from this disease. The notifications of scarlet fever (2,444) was the lowest figure recorded since 1941 and there were no deaths. The fatality rate for measles has declined considerably in recent years and from the 7,445 cases

notified only two deaths resulted. Similar remarks apply to diarrhoea and enteritis in children under two years of age and the 24 deaths registered during the year from these causes were the lowest on record. Deaths attributable to influenza fell sharply from 514 in 1953 to 83 in 1954, which was the lowest figure since 1948. There was a comparatively low incidence of poliomyelitis and of the 125 cases notified, about one-third occurred in each of the three age groups 0-4 years; 5-14 years; and 15 years and over. Notifications of dysentery (4,268) were the highest recorded, the heaviest incidence being found once again among children of pre-school age. Dysentery is often associated in the public mind with food infections but it should be noted that food-borne outbreaks are at present very uncommon and there is no evidence that the heavy incidence of recent years has been due to food infection.

### Tuberculosis.

The Report includes a detailed account and statistical data relating to recent trends in the mortality and morbidity of tuberculosis in London. During the past 10 years the outstanding change in this disease in London has been its greatly reduced mortality; in 1944 there were 2,073 deaths from lung tuberculosis (0.75 deaths per 1,000 population) compared with 596 deaths (a rate of 0.18 per 1,000 population) in 1954. About a century ago nearly one-fifth of all deaths in Londoners was due to tuberculosis; in 1950 the proportion had fallen to a thirtieth and in 1954 to a fiftieth. 77 per cent. of the deaths in 1954 from all forms of tuberculosis occurred among persons aged over 45 years and the majority (79 per cent.) of these deaths were in men. In relation to morbidity the picture, while encouraging, is not quite so satisfactory. In 1950 there were 39,780 cases of tuberculosis in London, representing 11.7 per 1,000 of the population. In 1954 the chest clinic registers recorded 37,624 cases, giving a prevalence rate of 11.3 per 1,000 inhabitants. In 1950 the number of new cases notified was 5,718; in 1954 new notifications were reduced to 4,641 and there was a reduction of 10 per cent. in the number of new lung cases notified during 1954 as compared with 1953. 60 per cent. of all new notifications in 1954 were in the age group 15-44 years and 30 per cent. in persons over 45. Since 1950 the proportion of persons over 45 among the new pulmonary notifications has increased from 20 per cent. to 30 per cent., while new cases among those under five have dropped from 5 per cent. of lung case notifications to 3 per cent. The routine vaccination by B.C.G. of 13-year-old school children found (after a tuberculin test) to be susceptible to tuberculosis was inaugurated during the year. About 25 per cent. of parents withheld their consent to vaccination but it is hoped that as the benefits of these preventive measures become more widely appreciated, more and more parents will take advantage of the arrangements. Of the children whose parents consented to vaccination, only 15 per cent. of those not in contact with a known case of tuberculosis were found to be "positive reactors," i.e., already infected by the tuberculosis germ (though not necessarily actively diseased).

### Care of Mothers and Young Children.

Eighty-six out of every 100 children born in London attended a child welfare centre at least once in their first year of life, compared with 85 in 1953, 84 in 1952 and 82 in 1951. Those infants who attend in their first year do so about 14 times. Educational activities at welfare centres including mothercraft training and health education, have been expanding year by year and in 1954 there were record attendances of 45,322. 45 per cent. of all expectant mothers attended the Council's ante-natal clinics, others obtaining ante-natal care through hospitals or family doctors. At the end of 1954 there were 105 day nurseries accommodating 5,850 children under five, in addition to which 1,590 children

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)