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REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE ON STATUS AND BACKGROUND OF SALK POLIOMYELITIS VACCINE

Chronology

On April 12, Dr. Thomas Francis of the University of Michigan reported that field trials of the Salk poliomyelitis vaccine conducted last year indicated that the vaccine was 60 to 90 percent effective as a preventive for polio. Simultaneously, the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis announced that it would provide vaccine for all first and second grade children in the United States. On the same day the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare announced that under the National Biologics Control Act, six firms had been granted licenses to manufacture the vaccine. They were: Cutter Laboratories, Berkeley, California; Eli Lilly Co., Indianapolis, Indiana; Parke-Davis & Co., Detroit, Michigan; Pittman-Moore Co., Zionville, Indiana; Sharp and Dohme, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Wyeth Laboratories, Inc., Marietta, Pennsylvania.

It was apparent, however, that even though some of these companies were already producing the vaccine, the supply situation would be critical for the next several months.

On April 14, the President directed the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare to survey and report to him on the best means of assuring equitable distribution of the vaccine.

On April 22, a scientific and technical meeting was attended by 25 groups and organizations representing the health and medical professions, the pharmaceutical and drug industries, and other professional groups. Among the recommendations of that group was the establishment of a National Advisory Committee on Poliomyelitis Vaccine to serve over the next few months. The Secretary, on the same day, recommended and received approval for the appointment of such a committee. The other recommendations of the conference, detailed below, were made public at the same time.

On April 27, a meeting was held of some 50 national organizations broadly representative of the public interest. The purpose was to provide them with current information about the availability of the vaccine and to give them full opportunity to express their views on the difficult questions of supply and distribution. They were advised that their viewpoints would be made immediately available to the National Advisory Committee. At the meeting, an announcement was made of the membership and chairman of that committee--Dr. Chester Keefer, Special Assistant to the Secretary for Health and Medical Affairs and Advisor to the President.

Cutter Vaccine Suspension

The Public Health Service late on April 26 and during the early morning of April 27 received reports of six cases of polio contracted by children vaccinated with materials from the Cutter Laboratories of Berkeley, California.* Shortly before noon the Surgeon General instructed Cutter temporarily to withdraw all of its vaccine. All State Health Departments were immediately notified and the suspension was reported to Mr. Hagerty's office, to the Chairman of the Congressional Committees concerned with HEW legislation, to the California members of the House and Senate, and to the press. Wire service and Washington reporters met with Drs. Keefer and Scheele within ten minutes after the announcement and the reasons for suspension were fully and carefully explained.

* As of noon April 27: 11 cases

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For Information