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James C. Hagerty, Press Secretary to the President

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Statement by the President

I would like to issue the following statement about the polio vaccine situation. The last week has been both eventful ~~and encouraging~~.

A committee of scientists is now screening polio vaccine before it is released for public use. The Surgeon General of the Public Health Service tells me that it is hoped to release some vaccine within a few days. Batches of vaccine must pass the most careful tests that scientists can devise and be as safe and effective as man can make the vaccine.

According to Dr. Francis' report on last year's field tests, the child who was vaccinated had a three times better chance of avoiding polio than the child who was not vaccinated.

There has been delay in the vaccination program. But remember - we are dealing in this field with the lives of our children and our grandchildren. Because of scientific work that was done during that delay science has learned new things about the way viruses behave in large scale manufacture and about the way we should make vaccine. Scientists have been able to design testing techniques of greater sensitivity and production techniques which build in a greater factor of safety and additional checks on the final product. So from that delay science has gained new knowledge, new safeguards.

I want to caution the people of our nation about two things:

First: No vaccination program can prevent all cases of the disease against which it is directed. Let us not forget that Dr. Francis reported the polio vaccine as used in the 1954 field trial was found to be 60-90% -- not 100% -- effective in the field trials last year.

Second: Although the manufacturers are now moving toward full scale production and distribution of this vaccine, it will take them varying periods of time to "retool" to meet the revised production standards. During the months immediately ahead we must be patient while our limited supply of vaccine is used first to help protect those who need it most.

Every parent and every child should be grateful to those scientists who have been working without rest and without relief during recent weeks to find answers to the problems that caused the delay. They have found those answers and another battle in the continuing fight against polio has been won.

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