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Measles Epidemic in Taipei Area, First Half of 1988

Beginning March 1988, the number of measles cases in Taipei Area (Taipei City and County) has increased significantly. According to statistics there have been 312 cases in total; last year in the same period there was only one case. This can be considered as an outbreak.

Of the 312 cases, 125 (40%) live in Taipei City, and 187 (60%) in Taipei County. 57% of them are male and 43% female. Their ages range from one to 35, with 43% of them in the 5-9 years age group, and 25% in the 1-4 years age group (see Figure 1). As the dates of the onset of disease are incomplete, the dates of reporting by physicians are used to construct an epidemic curve as Figure 2. It can be noted from the curve that the epidemic reached a plateau in May and June and declined thereafter, though further surveillance is still required. Of all cases, 39% are classified as confirmed cases, 22% suspects, and 39% unspecified. From the summaries on the reports, 63% of the cases are diagnozed based on the Koplik's spots, 4.5% on the serological test, and the rest not specified.

Of the 125 cases in Taipei City, 26 (21%) live in Shuan-yuan District, 25 (20%) in Shung-shan District, and 15 (12%) each in Chung-shan and Ta-an districts. Of the 187 cases in Taipei County, 38 (20%) live in San-chong City, 34 (18%) in Pan-chiau City, and 22 (12%) in Chung-ho City. When cases in Taipei City and County are compared of their sexes, ages, and epidemic curves, no significant difference is found.

Reported by Bureau of Disease Control, Department of Health.

Editorial note: The new reporting system for communicable disease was pilot-tested in Taipei City and County during October 1986 – Sep. 1987 Though there were also cases in the middle and southern parts of the Island, the reporting was incomplete. Thus, data from Taipei Area alone are used for analysis.

In the present report, the epidemic curve is constructed from the dates of reporting by the physicians and not from the dates of onset of disease primarily because a number of physicians failed to indicate the date of onset on the reports. A more complete curve can be obtained by using the reporting dates. Also, the curve is constructed on weekly basis, the effect should not be very large.

An increase in measles cases in Taipei City between November 1984 and March 1985 was reported previously. There was also an outbreak of measles in a primary school in Chi-mei Township of Penghu County in September 1985. When the age distributions of cases of present outbreak and cases of the out-patient department of the National Taiwan University Hospital in 1984-85 are compared, 49% of cases in the 1984-85 data and 43% of cases of Taipei Area are in the 5-9 years age group; whereas only 25% of cases in 1984-85 but 42% of cases in Taipei Area are in the 0-4 years age group.

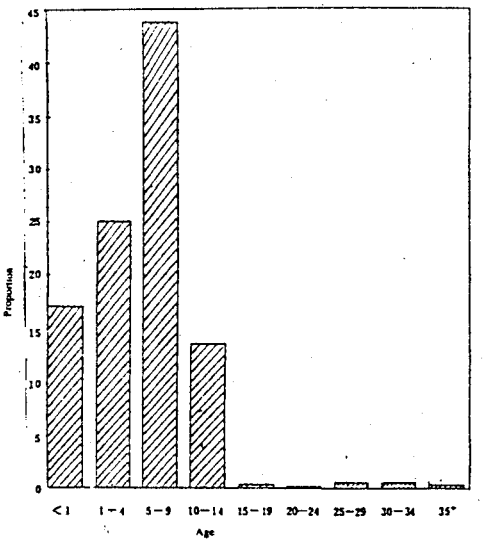

Fig. 1 Age Distribution of Measles Cases in Taipei Area, First Half of 1988

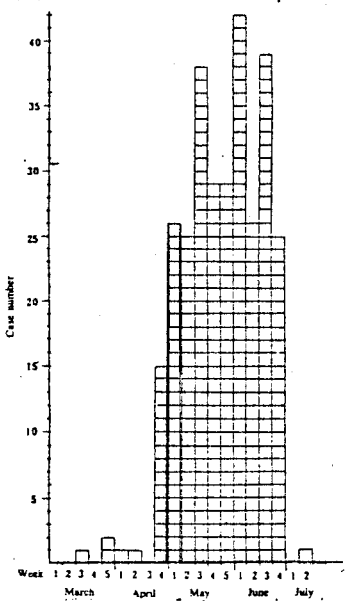

Fig. 2 Epidemic Curve of MeaslesCases in Taipei Area, First Half of 1988

The reports do not indicate the status of immunization. The Department of Health is drafting a program to follow-up the effect of immunization. Measles is a highly infectious disease, its complications include not only otitis media, pneumonia, and encephalitis, it can be a cause of infant death. Immunization is an effective preventive measure. Health agencies should strengthen the education programs to encourage parents to take their children for immunization to avoid any further epidemic.

References:

1. Department of Health. Measles-Taipei City, Epidemiol Bull (R.O.C.) 1985;1:25-27
2. Department of Health. Measles Outbreak in an Elementary School-Chi-Mei Island Epidemiol Bull (R.O.C.) 1985;1:97-102