

The Medical Roundup

by

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Diarrhea of Travelers

As many a person has found out, a few days after reaching a tourists' Mecca-like city, he has spent a day or two suffering from a violent form of diarrhea.

The last time I was in Mexico City, I spent all of the first night in this way. I

imagine I received the infection on the train. My impression was that the diarrhea I had was of an epidemic type which I have experienced three times, and which is probably due to a virus because, in one day, it can lay low every other nurse in a hospital. It always has seemed to me that this virus probably affects the nervous system of the bowel, and not the bowel itself. Why? Because when it has hit me I have had not the least soreness of the bowel or abdomen, as I should have had if I had suffered from an enteritis (inflammation of the inner lining of the bowel).

Also, I always recovered immediately which could hardly have happened if the diarrhea had been due to a dysentery-producing germ. It was nothing like the dysentery or cholera which attacks millions of people in the Orient and not infrequently kills them.

Ameba Assumed Cause

For many years, it was assumed that the cause of the diarrhea which attacks so many visitors to Mexico was an ameba (a microscopic single-celled organism), but my long experience with persons carrying amebas in their bowels has convinced me that rarely does even an acute amebiasis produce the violent and short-lived diarrhea which visitors to tropical countries commonly get. Also, in many of the cases, careful studies of the excreta of the patients fail to show any amebas, and anti-

amebic drugs do not protect the tourists. Amebiasis would tend to go on causing the person some intestinal discomfort or diarrhea, and it should stop the day the patient takes a large dose of a drug like Carbarzone. Also, I know from much experience with people who live in a tropical country that thousands of them have a bowel swarming with amebas which cause them no symptoms.

The most important point about many of the diarrheas that attack tourists is that, without any treatment, the patient is well again next day. I, myself, once walked around for years with a tremendous intestinal infestation with amebas and never had any distress from them, that I could identify. And, I was no healthier when I got rid of them.

Recently, studies have been made in Mexico by a team consisting of Dr. B. H. Kean, William Schaffner, B.S., Robert W. Brennan, A.B., and Somerset R. Waters, B.E., of New York City. They worked in cooperation with leading Mexican health authorities. In the study, 473 American college students who had gone to Mexico City were studied. There was some evidence that they could pick up the infection, whatever it was, from a roommate, because 57 per cent of the students who got diarrhea had a roommate who had it.

Only 34 per cent of the students who remained well had a diarrheic roommate during the two-week test period. The diarrhea suffered by the students usually lasted a day or so, just as mine did.

In order to see if diarrhea could be avoided, the students, on arrival, were divided into three groups. In one, the young people received a sugar "placebo" which could not help in any way. Another group received an antibiotic called neomycin and another got an antibiotic called phthalysulfathiazole. The diarrhea



FAMILY GOES HOME—English actress Diana Dors receives a kiss from her husband, comedian Richard Dawson, as she leaves Cedars of Lebanon hospital in Hollywood with her son, Gary, born June 27. The Dawsons have one other child, Mark, 2½. (UPI)

occurred in 24 per cent of those who got the sugar; in 16 per cent of those who got neomycin, and in 12 per cent of those who got the phthalysulfathiazole. The fact that the two drugs protected a few of the students suggested that the infecting agent was a germ and not a virus.

Didn't Avoid Infection

One of the things I observed during my last trip to Mexico was that, in their efforts to avoid getting a diarrhea, many tourists drank only bottled water. But they did not notice that the bus-boy or the waiter had opened the bottle and had poured it over ice cubes which I suspected, were put into the glass with unwashed hands. Also, I suspect many tourists eat salads which are put together by hand. Having been, in my youth, an expert on tropical medicine, I thought, as I went down on the train, that I had avoided all possible sources of

infection, but obviously I failed, because that first night in Mexico City I was very ill.

An interesting point is that travelers have learned that it is as easy to get a violent diarrhea in Europe or Asia as it is in Mexico. In some cases, a severe diarrhea contracted by a traveler hangs on, and then we physicians suspect that a dysentery-producing germ is present, but it is very difficult for a bacteriologist to identify it.

When a member of the family suffers a mental illness, the entire family is affected. What can you do to help? For answers to your questions read Dr. Alvarez' booklet, "When Mental Illness Strikes a Family." To obtain it, send 25 cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your request to Dr. Walter C. Alvarez, Dept. MMT, The Register and Tribune Syndicate, Box 957, Des Moines 4, Iowa.

Small Worlds Around Us

By LYNN M. WATKINS

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The pavement, under the blowtorch rays of the sun, felt like a hot stove lid. People crossing the street seemed to dance; the heat penetrated the thickest shoe soles. It was only natural that some wise guy should show up with a raw egg. A crowd gathered, forgetting for a moment how uncomfortable they were, in hopes of seeing an egg actually fry on the pavement.

The egg was broken, the contents poured onto the hot concrete. It sizzled and splattered, turned quickly from a liquid to a solid; turned slowly from white to brown as the edges became overcooked.

Someone came with a strip of bacon and dropped it beside the egg.

The perspiring crowd laughed and watched the bacon sizzle and hiss, then twist and turn on itself as if in pain. For a few moments they watched the significant act of proving that the pavement was, indeed, hot enough to fry an egg on—with bacon on the side.

Then, by the time the bacon and eggs were well done, they remembered their discomfort in the heat and scurried to the shade of their homes.

All except one man. He had an idea. From a nearby market he secured a small piece of fresh meat. Close to the curb, away from the traffic in the street but on the red-hot pavement, he dropped the meat. It began to fry.

However, the man was not watching the meat, he was watching a small ant leisurely

sauntering across the hot concrete. The insect smelled the meat, turned and approached it. Carefully, and from all sides the ant surveyed this treasure. He walked around the meat several times, figuring its weight and size, evidently making up his mind how many worker ants would be necessary to transport the meat to the home hive.

Obviously the ant didn't know the pavement was "as hot as a stove lid." Satisfied with his find, the ant scurried away.

The man noticed the ant had stood perfectly still several times, but at no time did it seem the least bit bothered by the hot pavement.

A steady stream of them were coming and going. None seemed uncomfortable. Some seemed stopped to tap its antenna with another ant it happened to meet.

Soon the meat was all gone, carried away bit by bit. But not a one had flinched; evidently not a one had noticed the pavement was "hot enough to fry an egg."

Those folks who had watched the egg and bacon frying and then retired, missed the main act.

Air Force Academy, Colorado—The U.S. Air Force Academy, near Colorado Springs, now outdraws famed Pike's Peak as a tourist attraction, according to the Academy's information office. About 2 million visitors are expected to tour the institution this year.



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