

# Researchers Press Study Of Hepatitis

By MAXINE SITTS

Fifteen years ago, every patient and employe at Willowbrook State School could expect to contract infectious hepatitis.

Today, incidence of the disease among patients is between six and eight cases a month out of nearly 6,000 residents.

Hepatitis is always found wherever large groups of people live in close quarters. This includes large institutions as well as military personnel.

Successful tactics developed at Willowbrook to combat hepatitis are known throughout the world, but unfortunately the methods of prevention are not applicable to a general population.

After 11 years of testing, doctors and researchers at the state institution have isolated two strains of hepatitis virus. The first, dubbed the "Willowbrook strain," was discovered years ago—the discovery of the second was reported earlier this year.

Willowbrook protects both its residents and employes against severe attacks of the disease by injecting them with a speci-

fied amount of gamma globulin, which provides some immunity if a person comes in contact with hepatitis virus during the next five months.

The gamma globulin does not prevent the disease—instead, it causes a person to have only a mild case. But in contracting hepatitis, even in a light form, the person's body builds an immunity to the disease in the future.

Many cases of hepatitis at Willowbrook are so mild, that only the careful study of blood samples reveals the disease.

The "victim" in many cases does not even realize he is ill, although he may experience some loss of appetite, abdominal pain, fever, chills, or nausea. In few cases does the hepatitis develop in the jaundice or yellow appearance.

Because of the extensive research on hepatitis at Willowbrook, however, doctors are always on the alert for possible cases. If a blood sample from a patient proves positive, the case is immediately reported to the city Health Department—even if the case is slight.

Last year, 79 such cases were reported to the department, noted Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook director.

Dr. Hammond pointed out that the successful gamma globulin program at Willowbrook cannot be applied to a population at large.

Because gamma globulin is expensive and rare (the hospital gets its supply from the surgeon-general of the Army), it is given only in cases of known contact or exposure.

For instance, the injections are given to military troops on

their way to areas of existing hepatitis, such as Vietnam.

In the population at large, it is harder to discover if a person has been exposed to the

disease. In many cases, persons with hepatitis who are spread- ing the virus do not even know they are ill.

A general feeling of irritability or sluggishness may be all they experience. In these cases, according to Dr. Hammond, the person will probably completely recover from the disease without ever realizing he had it.

Last year, according to the Health Department, Staten Island had a rate of 45 cases of hepatitis per 100,000 population, compared to a city rate of 13.4. These figures may mean that the Island has more than its share of hepatitis.

Or it may mean, as Dr. Harold H. Berman, former director of Willowbrook, pointed out, that doctors on the Island are more aware of hepatitis and are thus correctly diagnosing cases of the disease which might otherwise go undetected.

"Island doctors are lucky to have Willowbrook," stated Dr. Berman. "The research on communicable diseases there has added to their knowledge. 'I wonder,' he mused, 'how many cases of infectious hepatitis were correctly diagnosed and reported in Harlem last year.'"

Doctors point out that hepatitis virus can be transmitted only by internal ingestion.

It follows, they note, that children should be made to wash hands thoroughly before eating.