

# Immunization Is Reported In Serum Hepatitis Tests

*New York Times*  
March 24, 1971

By LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN

Researchers at New York University Medical Center reported yesterday that they had apparently succeeded in immunizing a small group of children against serum hepatitis in a series of continuing experiments.

Serum hepatitis, one of the two basic forms of the liver-damaging disease generally known as hepatitis, can be spread by blood transfusion.

The serum type is said to affect more than 150,000 Americans each year and to kill about 3,000, often those weakened by other diseases.

The report was made by Dr. Saul Krugman, head of the research team, to an excited audience of hepatitis experts, physicians and medical students who packed the center's auditorium at 550 First Avenue.

It was an emotion-charged atmosphere in which many felt that an important basic step had been taken in combating a ravaging disease.

But the researchers emphasized that their results were preliminary, that they had injected just a few children for investigational purposes only,

and that more time was needed to evaluate the duration of the protection provided.

They expressed the hope, however, that their immunizations would ultimately lead the way to a vaccine for prevention of serum hepatitis.

Like vaccines against other infectious diseases, the researchers said, extensive testing of the hepatitis immunizations is required before such agents can qualify for approval by the Division of Biologics Standards at Bethesda, Md., the Federal agency responsible for such licenses.

When available, immunization would be used only for prevention of hepatitis, the doctors said, since it would not benefit a patient after the disease had made him lose his appetite, damaged his liver cells and turned his eyes and skin yellow.



The New York Times  
Dr. Saul Krugman at the  
N.Y.U. Medical Center.

The results of the researchers' studies, which had been presented to a closed scientific meeting in Washington earlier this month, amplified reports that they had published recently in the Journal of Infectious Disease and the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Dr. Krugman said that he was worried about declining Federal support for all medical research and that this had led him to take the unusual step of publicly announcing his group's findings before further publication in medical journals.

#### Team of Researchers

Dr. Krugman is professor and chairman of the department of pediatrics at the medical center. His co-workers were Dr. Joan Giles, a research pediatrician, and Dr. Jack Hammond, who directs the Willowbrook State School, an institution for mentally retarded people, on Staten Island.

Federal research cutbacks on the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Krugman said, threaten the solution of the riddle of serum hepatitis and other diseases.

Serum hepatitis has been a major public health problem throughout the world at least since 1883, when Dr. A. Lurman was credited with first describing a group of such cases in Germany.

A variety of viruses and chemicals such as drugs and alcohol can cause hepatitis, which means inflammation of the liver. When people speak of hepatitis, generally they mean the illness caused by one of at least two viruses.

Doctors recognize two types of viral hepatitis — infectious and serum—that they can distinguish only by the length of their incubation periods.

Infectious hepatitis — which affects tens of thousands of Americans, with some fatalities — usually takes weeks to make a person ill, whereas serum hepatitis generally takes months to produce its damage to the its critical role in regulating liver. Man needs this organ for many of the body's chemical and energy reactions.

Much of the understanding of the distinction between how the types make Americans sick has resulted from studies done by Dr. Krugman's group at New York University and at Willowbrook during the last 15 years.

Willowbrook, like other institutions caring for mentally retarded people, has had a chronic epidemic of hepatitis since 1949. A total of 5,500 adults and children live in close contact at Willowbrook, which Dr. Krugman said was the largest such institution in this country.

Crowded living conditions contribute to the high rates of hepatitis and dysentery that exist at institutions such as Willowbrook. Hepatitis can be spread from person-to-person through improper sanitary methods. Also, it can spread through contaminated water and food.

Dr. Krugman stressed that hepatitis tends to be a much milder disease in children than in adults. Yet hepatitis in children is a serious public health problem because youngsters can become long-term carriers of the disease and spread it to adults. It is a serious problem among military troops.

The ethics of the studies that Dr. Krugman has done at Willowbrook have been criticized in the past by legislators like Senator Seymour R. Thaler, Democrat-Liberal from Queens, and by some physicians such as Dr. Henry K. Beecher, of Boston.

When reached in Albany yesterday Senator Thaler hailed the research and said he was now persuaded that the work was being properly conducted.

Dr. Krugman emphasized yesterday that his team had obtained written informed consent for the experiments from the parents of each of the children at Willowbrook. Also, he said, the studies always had been reviewed beforehand with Government officials in New York and Washington, D. C.