

PREVALANCE OF ARBOVIRUS INFECTIONS IN SRI LANKA: RESULTS OF A 1976 SURVEY COMPARED WITH THAT OF 1966.

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Since the survey carried out in 1966 there has been no proper surveillance of the activity of arboviruses in Sri Lanka. In view of the alarming spread of Dengue haemorrhagic fever in South East Asia there is a need to determine the susceptibility of the population as well as the activity of these viruses and their vectors in different parts of the country in order to prepare a preventive programme. This is a preliminary report of a survey begun this year.

50 blood samples (a fixed number per age group) were collected from hospital patients, not suffering from a virus infection, in each of the following towns:—Anuradhapura, Jaffna, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, Badulla, Ratnapura, Galle, Matara, Negombo, Chilaw, Panadura, Kurunegala, Tissamaharama and Colombo. These sera were tested for haemagglutination inhibiting antibodies to the arboviruses (Dengue, Chikungunya, Japanese encephalitis and Sindbis) prevalent in Sri Lanka using a modification of the method of Clarke and Casals.

In comparison with 1966, for the island as a whole, there appears to have been:—

- (1) a reduction in Dengue activity,
- (2) a marked drop in Chikungunya and
- (3) a greater susceptibility to arbovirus infestions, specially in the younger age groups.

There appears to be no recent Dengue activity in Nuwara Eliya and Tissamaharama while Anuradhapura has little; but Kandy, Matara and Jaffna have shown a significant increase. However there is a suggestion of a recent increase in the level of activity of both virus groups in several towns. Are we on the threshold of another epidemic?