

THE EPIDEMIC OF INFLUENZA

BY S. BOUCHER, M.D.

Director of the Department of Health of the City of Montreal

INFLUENZA made its appearance in Montreal during the last days of September and in a very short time had spread all over the city. From day to day the newspapers published the number of cases and of deaths reported and the total was, on Thursday, November 7th, 17,252 cases and 3,028 deaths. The number of deaths is correct, because no funeral or transportation of bodies outside the city can be made without a permit from the City Hall, but the same thing cannot be said of the reporting of cases.

At first the declaration of cases was not compulsory and the figures of the first days must necessarily be very incorrect. Even after the declaration had been made obligatory at the beginning of the second week in October, many doctors either neglected to report all their cases or, through press of work, reported only a part of those they attended. For this reason, it is quite impossible to say that the above mentioned number of 17,252 cases is correct, or how far it may be from the real number of cases.

Another reason why the number of declarations may be far from being accurate is that the actual figures would give a death rate far too high, even when taking into account the intensity of the disease and the fact that the bad weather led to fatal pulmonary complications.

We are thus led to take the number of deaths rather than the number of declarations as a criterion. From the figures we publish below, it will be seen that the climax of the disease was during the week beginning October 13th:

	Reported	Deaths
October 1.....	17	11
October 2.....	3	13
October 3.....	7	10
October 4.....	22	12
October 5.....	111	26
October 6.....	21	18
October 7.....	111	27

	Reported	Deaths
October 8.....	119	27
October 9.....	132	23
October 10.....	398	59
October 11.....	202	51
October 12.....	357	68
October 13.....	367	43
October 14.....	378	165
October 15.....	1,868	153
October 16.....	1,748	162
October 17.....	1,300	166
October 18.....	750	163
October 19.....	617	195
October 20.....	40	113
October 21.....	1,633	201
October 22.....	1,063	155
October 23.....	907	133
October 24.....	865	139
October 25.....	989	125
October 26.....	487	94
October 27.....	19	73
October 28.....	1,148	142
October 29.....	336	69
October 30.....	151	77
October 31.....	139	55
November 1.....	161	43
November 2.....	116	58
November 3.....	16	35
November 4.....	154	46
November 5.....	103	23
November 6.....	53	24
Delayed cases.....	171	...
November 7.....	4	31
Delayed cases.....	69	...
Totals.....	17,252	3,028

Concerning these figures, the remark should be made that the high figures of the Mondays are partly to be allotted to the preceding Sunday, many physicians sending their reports by mail on the Monday for the day before.

The disease has decreased both in rapidity and in virulence

and date of writing, November 7th, it will be seen that Montreal is now, barring a possible but pretty improbable recrudescence, on a fair way to its normal death rate.

From the beginning, the Department of Health took energetic means of combating the disease. When there were still only a few cases declared, advice in the form of posters and circulars were distributed to the press, the schools, and the homes broadcast.

On October 8th, an emergency meeting of the Board of Health was called at the City Hall and resolutions were adopted calling for the immediate closing of all places of public meeting, such as schools, theatres, dance halls, moving picture houses, concert halls, etc. The military authorities were called upon to confine the soldiers in the barracks. The clergy were requested to reduce to a minimum their church functions. The stores were ordered to close at 4 p.m., in order to decrease the congestion in tramcars.

On October 10th, a new Board of Health composed of physicians was named to replace the old Board which was composed of laymen. The Board immediately confirmed the above mentioned decisions and further decreed that all churches should be closed on Sundays, that stores, with the exceptions of those selling necessities of life, should close at 4 p.m., that all places of amusement, whether in halls or out of doors, should be closed. Several rules were adopted concerning boarding schools, public offices, hospitals, banks, Courts of Justice, tramcars, the transportation of bodies of persons dead from influenza, etc.

At the very beginning of the epidemic, steps had been taken to provide an emergency hospital for influenza patients too poor or friendless to be treated at home or unable to get a place in the general hospitals.

The Meurling Refuge was fitted up as a hospital with 225 beds. This was soon found to be insufficient and the following emergency hospitals were opened:

Moreau Street Civic Hospital, 60 beds; St. Joseph's School, 49 beds; St. Justine (for children), 50 beds; St. Arsène Orphanage (for boys), 50 beds; St. Clement's School, 75 beds; the Grenadier Guards Armoury (loaned by the military authorities), 75 beds; one hospital for the Chinese, 12 beds.

The general hospitals pooled their resources with the civic hospitals, and patients were sent to the Royal Victoria Hospital,

Montreal General Hospital, Hôtel Dieu, Notre Dame Hospital, Alexandra Hospital, St. Paul Hospital, and the Western Hospital.

The staffs of the emergency hospitals were formed of the physicians and nurses in the employ of the city, with the help of the Roman Catholic communities of Nuns and Brothers, both from teaching and from charitable institutions, the former as nurses and the latter as orderlies. These communities were:

The Grey Nuns, the Nuns of the Holy Cross, of St. Ann, of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, of the Congregation of Notre Dame, of the Providence, of Hope, of the Immaculate Conception, les Filles de la Sagesse; Brothers of the following orders: Christian Schools, St. Gabriel, Christian Instruction.

The co-operation was enlisted of the following organizations: St. Vincent de Paul Society (with their eighty sections), Société Catholique de Protection et de Renseignement, Victorian Order of Nurses, Canadian Red Cross (English and French sections), Imperial Daughters of the Empire, Montreal Day Nursery, Emergency Nursery, Patriotic Fund, Jewish Federation of Charities, Melville Social Service, Red Mogen Dovid, Canadian Belgian Musical and Dramatic Club, Charity Organization Society, Iverley Settlement, University Settlement, Soldiers' Wives' League, Catholic Social Service Guild, Irish Protestant Benevolent Society, etc.

Besides giving help in the emergency hospitals, the Roman Catholic communities of Brothers and Nuns also gave splendid service in visiting families and giving aid of all kinds to the poor and the destitute.

In order to co-ordinate all these efforts, as well as those of physicians and nurses willing to help their confrères who had too many patients on their hands, a bureau was established at the City Hall Annex in charge of a competent civic employee whose work soon had the desired effect in directing help to the poor who could not get medical attendance.

A similar bureau on a much wider scale was established up-town where a number of ladies divided in a French and an English section, also did excellent work in procuring medical attendance, food, fuel, clothing, etc., for the poor.

The necessary co-operation between the hospitals, both civic and general, was established through a Hospitals Commission who worked untiringly during the peak of the epidemic, directing the sick to the hospitals nearest their residence.

The police and firemen forces generously aided in this difficult question of helping the poor by undertaking to carry food

and fuel to the homes of those who could not go out to get these necessities or who could not afford to pay for them.

Although all this organization was extemporised, it worked out harmoniously and smoothly. It was inevitable that at first there would be some delays, but the staffs of the several emergency hospitals soon settled down to the routine and eventually all was in splendid order. During the first days there was some congestion in the admittance to the hospitals and some criticism was brought against the management of the Meurling Hospital because it did not very promptly fill its beds.

This criticism was most unjust, inasmuch as it remedied nothing, but it soon died out and the Hospitals Commission, which was appointed upon its representation, admitted that the management had done splendidly. The opening of the other emergency hospitals and the pooling of the resources of the general hospitals through a committee of ambulance service composed of Dr. Dunstan Gray, Dr. F. X. Lessard, of Notre Dame Hospital, and Mr. Webster, of the Royal Victoria Hospital, had the desired effect of abating the congestion.

Thanks to the officer commanding the A.M.S.C. of the 4th District, a number of military medical men were available for the emergency hospitals and rendered most valuable help.

The accompanying charts show the course of the disease from October 1st and the organization of the fight against it. They will be of much interest to the reader because they show at a glance what was done and what was the results of the combined efforts.

The Board of Health whose untiring work in seconding the efforts of the writer was of inestimable value, is composed of Mr. E. R. Decary, president of the Administrative Commission, chairman; Dr. David J. Evans, vice-chairman; Dr. Horst Oertel, Dr. L. de L. Harwood, Dr. J. E. Dubé, Mr. Beaudry Leman, His Worship the Mayor being also a member ex-officio. Their energy in dealing with a most serious and difficult situation, their devotion to the grave responsibilities they had to shoulder have been most marked. The writer is especially glad to tender to Mr. Decary his grateful acknowledgement of the most valuable support he got from him in his dual capacity as president of the Administrative Commission and of chairman of the Board of Health.

