than washing with soap and water in the numbers of *Staphylococcus aureus* on the hands of nurses in a skin hospital. Alcohol and alcoholic chlorhexidine were well tolerated and much less expensive than antiseptic detergent preparations. A large residual antimicrobial effect was found on the skin after disinfection with alcoholic chlorhexidine.

Among other agents tested 2% Irgasan DP 300 (2, 4, 4'trichloro 2' hydroxy-diphenyl ether) in a detergent base had a negligible immediate effect but a cumulative effect on repeated use almost as great as that of a 4% chlorhexidine detergent preparation.

When rubber gloves were worn for three hours after disinfection of the hands with various antimicrobial preparations (including 95% ethyl and isopropyl alcohols), the numbers of bacteria on the skin, expressed as a percentage of the pre-disinfection counts, were lower than the skin bacterial counts obtained immediately after disinfection.

**Laboratory Autoclaves—Dangers and Safety**

E. H. GILLESPIE AND S. A. GIBBONS (Public Health Laboratory, Northern General Hospital, Sheffield) Using a laboratory downward displacement vertical autoclave, the risk of failure to sterilize discard barrels has been demonstrated. The use of proper temperature and time controls can prevent this risk.

Wire baskets or containers with perforated sides are better than solid containers.

For sterilizing media in bottles it is safer to use cotton wool plugs or very loose caps.

When using sealed bottles one should not use a simple downward displacement autoclave but, if used, strict monitoring of temperatures and times is essential both in the heating up stage and, especially, in the cooling stage.

The temperatures in bottles are slow to rise. Cooling is very slow so that there could be a danger of attempting to remove bottles when the fluid temperature is well in excess of 80°C as the bottles could explode by thermal shock due to the high internal pressure.

It is suggested that all laboratory autoclaves should have a load temperature simulator or similar device to control automatically the temperature of the loading during the cycle. For fluid media sterilization, it is suggested that, in addition to a simulator, one should consider the use of accelerated cooling to reduce damage to the media and to bring the temperature down rapidly and thus return the internal pressure in the bottles to a safe level. The opening of the sterilizer door or lid should be automatically controlled by the load temperature simulator.

In the meantime bacteriologists should monitor the times and temperatures in different loads by the use of thermocouples and thereby draw up a schedule for each type of cycle.

**Hepatitis B Antigen Subtypes in North-West England and North Wales**

HELEN T. GREEN AND G. C. TURNER (Public Health Laboratory, Fazakerley Hospital, Liverpool) Serum samples collected between 1969 and 1974 from 361 HBsAg-positive patients and blood donors in North-West England and North Wales were tested for subtyping reactions by an immunodiffusion method using anti-ad and anti-ay sera; 318 sera were subtypable by this method including two of the uncommon subtype a.

Among symptomless carriers of HBsAg, subtype ad was predominant and accounted for 76%; 23% were of subtype ay. In patients with chronic liver disease the subtypes were more evenly distributed with ad 55% and ay 45%. Among patients with acute hepatitis the distribution of subtypes in post-transfusion cases was ad 50%, ay 47%, and patients without a history of parenteral exposure ad 46%, ay 54%. On the other hand, ay predominated among patients with hepatitis who admitted an association with drugs (ad 5%, ay 95%) and those with a history of injections or tattoos (ad 15%, ay 85%). All cases of hepatitis among the staff of a haemodialysis unit were ay.

These findings are similar to those reported from other parts of North-West Europe and North America. When both ad and ay subtypes are present in the community they evidently differ in that ay causes acute hepatitis more readily than ad, and this difference is most pronounced when transmission is by parenteral routes associated with small amounts of blood.

**Hepatitis B Infection in Families of Hepatitis B Antigen Carriers**

D. M. JONES, JUDITH M. HELLAWEIL, AND I. W. DYMOCK (Department of Bacteriology, Withington Hospital, Manchester) To investigate the degree of transmission of infection from healthy asymptomatic carriers of hepatitis B antigen (HBsAg) the family contacts of 41 such carriers have been studied. In 23 of the 41 families there were no other individuals who were either HBsAg positive or had antibody to the antigen. Comparing the 18 families where members other than the index carrier were either antigen or antibody positive, this could not be related to the titre of the antigen in the index carrier, to the sub-type of the antigen, or to the presence of cryptic liver disease. The index carriers showed the usual male predominance that is found amongst HBsAg carriers (32 male, 9 female) and this distribution itself reduces the chance of observing the effects of maternal transmission of virus to children in this group of carriers. Altogether 93 blood relatives (parents, siblings, and offspring) were tested, and nine of these were HBsAg positive and 15 were antibody positive (ie, 26%, had evidence of infection at some time). The sexual partners (5 male, 24 female) of 29 index carriers were tested; none of these was HBsAg positive but seven (24%) had antibody (25% female spouses, 20% male spouses). There was therefore no indication that the infection was spread any more by sexual contact than by other household contact, and no indication that the sex of the carrier was particularly relevant in the transmission of infection to the spouse. The family contacts who were found to be HBsAg positive and presumably also carriers were all blood relatives. This finding is in agreement with the suggestion that there may be a genetic susceptibility to becoming a carrier of HBsAg. There were 45 children of the index carriers, and of these 11 were female and 34 male. This remarkable male preponderance (p = 0.003) may be another manifestation of a genetic trait and was not found in a parallel group of families where there were no carriers but where one parent was HBsAg antibody positive.

**SYMPOSIUM ON SOME MEDICAL HAZARDS OF COUNTRY LIFE**

**Farmer's Lung**

D. W. R. MACKENZIE (Mycological Reference Laboratory, School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London) Farmer's
Proceedings: Laboratory autoclaves--dangers and safety.

E H Gillespie and S A Gibbons

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