

children born in West Germany will be between 3500 and 6000. Two out of three are expected to live. Most are apparently of normal mentality.

The drug was withdrawn from the British market five days after the withdrawal in West Germany. The Guardian, Manchester, has predicted that August will see the birth of 800 deformed English children. The Ministry of Health has begun to fit 50 victims with artificial limbs.

EIGHT IN CANADA

An article prepared for the May 19 issue of Maclean's Magazine said that at the time of writing eight victims of phocomelia had been born in Canada, two of them to physicians' wives who had used "samples of thalidomide donated to their husbands."

Because the Department of Health did not order thalidomide withdrawn from sale until March 2, Maclean's said the last Canadian casualties are not expected until November.

The cause of the West German outbreak was hard to trace. Hereditary factors, blood incompatibility between parents, abnormal chromosomes, radioactive fallout, X-rays, detergents, food preservatives—all of these things, and more, were suspected, checked and discarded as possibilities.

A Hamburg pediatrician, Dr. Widukind Lenz, made preliminary studies showing that about 20 per cent of the mothers who brought deformed infants to his clinic had taken Contergan. Dr. Taussig wrote:

"On Nov. 8, 1961, it occurred to him that Contergan was the cause. He re-questioned his patients and the incidence promptly rose to about 50 per cent. Many of the patients said they had considered the drug too innocent to mention it on the questionnaire . . .

MAKER WARNED

"On Nov. 15 he warned Grunenthal (the manufacturer) that he suspected Contergan was the cause and that the drug should be withdrawn."

Five days later, at a pediatric meeting in Dusseldorf he reported his suspicions and his actions but did not name the drug. That night Dr. Taussig related, "a physician came up to him and said, 'Will you tell me confidentially, is it the drug Contergan? I ask because we have such a child and my wife took Contergan.'"

"A couple of days later it was generally known that Contergan was the drug under suspicion. On Nov. 26 Grunenthal withdrew the drug from the market. On Nov. 28 the Ministry of Health issued a firm but cautious and widely publicized statement that Contergan was suspected to be a major factor in the production of phocomelia."

Dr. Taussig reported that an Australian physician, Dr. W. G. McBride, saw three severe cases in April, 1961, and three more in October and November. "He found that all six mothers had taken Distaval in early pregnancy," the Journal article said.

In Stirlingshire, Scotland, Dr. A. L. Spiers saw 10 severe phocomelia victims during 1961 and ultimately "obtained positive proof that 8 out of 10 of these patients had taken Distaval."

DIFFICULT CONNECTION

Making the connection—which some physicians say is not conclusively established—was extraordinarily difficult.

Dr. Lenz, for example, had to contend with the lack of records during the time when Contergan was sold without prescription, and with his patients' natural difficulty in recalling if and precisely when they had taken a sleeping pill months earlier.

"In one instance," Dr. Taussig wrote, a doctor "swore the mother had not received Contergan. He had prescribed an entirely different sedative. On investigation at the pharmacy . . . Dr. Lenz found the prescription was stamped 'drug not in stock, Contergan given instead.'"

Dr. Taussig said the investigations of Dr. Lenz in particular indicate that the embryo is endangered if a mother takes thalidomide within about 20 to 40 days after conception, a time when she may not even know that she is pregnant.

He believes that during that sensitive period the chances that a mother who has taken the drug will deliver a deformed baby are at least two in five.