

NID 84-114 JX

5/15/84

INDIA: Dysentery Epidemic

The epidemic of shigella dysentery in West Bengal could sweep throughout India. The Indian Minister of Health and other sources say this virulent dysentery has infected more than 38,000 people in West Bengal since late March. There have been 1,399 recorded deaths since then—mostly young children. The causative organism is a strain of shigella dysenteriae that has become resistant to all readily available antibiotic drugs. ■

Comment: The size and seriousness of the epidemic could increase rapidly because the hot and wet summer months will be favorable for transmitting dysentery. The epidemic could also reach nearby countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. Checking the spread of the disease will be very difficult because of poor sanitation, crowding, contaminated water, and hordes of flies, and because of the bacterium's resistance to antibiotic drugs. Vaccine under development in the US requires one to two years more research and testing before it is acceptable for widespread use. ■