

POSTAGE STAMPS ALIVE WITH GERMS

Scientists Find Them Potent
Carriers of Bacteria and a
Source of Danger.

ONLY TWO IN FIFTY CLEAN

Suggested That Public Moisteners
Be Maintained Wherever
Stamps Are Sold.

Two Philadelphia scientists, Dr. Robert A. Kelty and Phillip D. McMaster, have been carrying on an investigation in the McManus Laboratory of Pathology of the University of Pennsylvania to determine whether or not postage stamps are germ carriers. Their experiments have been completed and the results were published in yesterday's issue of The Medical Record.

The answer to the query is "Yes." They learned that out of fifty stamps tested in several ways forty-eight yielded bacteria. On the other hand, with the possible exception of two cases, none of the germs isolated could cause disease.

This does not mean, however, that care should not be exercised in handling stamps, for it is just as easy for them to be impregnated with disease germs as with those that are harmless, the experimenters say. Here is part of their report:

"The purpose of this study was to determine the normal bacterial flora of postage stamps, that is, to get some idea of the general character of bacteria found on stamps, with especial emphasis in the search for tubercle bacilli, bacillus tetani, the colon group, and diphtherial forms.

"The literature on this subject is surprisingly meagre, and but little record is made of the bacteria of stamps. The subject is usually approached from the viewpoint of the spread of infection by the postal service as a whole, the infection by letters, and the fumiga-

tion of letters, and but little record is made of infection by stamps, or of the bacteria of stamps.

Stamps From Fifty Sources.

"In order to determine this fifty stamps were bought in various stores in Philadelphia, including the central office, branch stores, almost all the large department stores, and some of the small general stores. Most of the stamps were bought from sheets and a few, (three,) from stamp books. The character of the place was noted, its general cleanliness, the clerk and his appearance, and whether the stamps were placed on the counter with the change, or not. In almost all cases they were presented with the glue side up, showing that the precepts of public hygiene have had that much effect.

"The majority of the stamps showed one or more organisms, but in no single instance were they found to be pathogenic in type. This does not exclude the fact that under favorable conditions certain pathogenic types which would resist drying to a certain extent, might be carried on a postage stamp. On the other hand the work proves the stamp to be a carrier of organisms, and these could be readily transferred from one individual to another. This would only be of importance where the organism was pathogenic.

A Dangerous Drug Store.

"We have in mind a drug store where one of the members of the druggist's family had advanced tuberculosis. His sputum contained many bacilli, he had a hacking cough and was in the habit of protecting his mouth with his hand while coughing. During busy times he often served customers, and not infrequently dispensed stamps to children, who would immediately moisten them with their mouths and paste them to letters. A single exposure in this case might prove negative, but the constant exposure in some cases would undoubtedly end in infection."

These conclusions were reached by the investigators:

"A study of fifty stamps obtained from as many different sources, clean, dirty, and indifferent, showed bacteria in every instance except two.

"With the possible exception of two cases no organism pathogenic in type was discovered.

"Aside from hygienic reasons, it is dangerous to lick postage stamps on the ground that the stamps are bacteria-laden, and under favorable conditions might easily convey pathogenic types, especially colon, diphtheria, and tubercle bacilli.

"We would therefore advocate a movement to have installed in all places dispensing postage stamps a moistening device of some type. This movement could be started with beneficent results in the Post Offices of the United States Government."