

Epidemics Among Indians Feared

By Jack Anderson

Health experts fear that epidemics may break out on the nation's Indian reservations because of a critical lack of doctors and facilities. Indians already have the highest disease rate and lowest life expectancy of any group in the nation.

In an urgent memo to Chairman James Abourezk (D-S.D.), the staff of the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs reports evidence of "tuberculosis outbreaks" and "other serious disease epidemics" particularly in the Aberdeen, S.D., area.

"We believe that the urgency of the present situation cannot be overemphasized," they stress.

The memo declares that "the backlog of people needing corrective surgery is now past 20,000. Of that number, 13,000 children are in need of surgery."

Yet President Nixon has impounded Indian Health Service money four of the last five years. This has caused a critical shortage of funds, which has brought on the Indian health crisis.

Without adequate funds, a "serious and growing shortage of physicians" has developed in facilities serving the Indians.

"The physician shortage," states the memo, "exacerbates

the already deteriorating conditions brought on by an increased patient load and inflated costs. By June, 1974, facilities may have to close down for lack of physicians."

The facilities used by the Indian Health Service have also fallen into deplorable shape. "In the Aberdeen area alone," reports the memo, "60 per cent of the buildings being used by IHS have been declared unfit for use by state inspectors.

"For example, Rosbud Hospital was constructed in 1914 and has been condemned even by IHS, but for lack of funds they will have to make do."

Nor can the Indians rely on their own people for health care. There are only 52 Indian doctors in the entire United States. The IHS has launched a new recruitment drive for doctors, but the program is unlikely to help Indians in critical need of health care now.

Secret Patrol—Armed Coast Guard cutters have been waging a secret war in the Caribbean against dope smugglers, illegal immigrants and anti-Castro commandos trying to land in Cuba.

Testifying behind locked doors on Capitol Hill, Vice Adm. Thomas Sargent, the acting Coast Guard commandant, told

how his men were cracking down on "those who would hijack Cuban vessels or use the United States as a staging area for attacks on Cuban vessels or . . . territory."

He added confidentially: "I would not like to publicize too widely this particular patrol." The Coast Guard is helping to protect dictator Fidel Castro from his enemies, Sargent explained, in order to get Castro's cooperation in dealing with hijackers.

The Coast Guard's cutters, bolstered by planes and helicopters, also have seized thousands of pounds of dope and have blocked hundreds of restless Haitians from sneaking into the United States, reported Sargent. The cutters have even intervened in gunfights between American and Bahaman lobster fishermen.

The Coast Guard witnesses appeared before Rep. John Murphy's Coast Guard subcommittee to tell about the dangerous operations.

Describing a typical encounter, the Coast Guard related how the doughty cutter, the Coura, "\$1,000 per person is paid," he said, so "that the skipper of a boat or aircraft will arrange to Dick. The crew of the Gilma I tossed barrels of marijuana

overboard and tried to escape into Bahaman waters.

The Coast Guard is also kept busy, added Operations Chief Adm. W. A. Jenkins, keeping Haitians from slipping into Florida.

When the British controlled the Bahamas, he explained, they brought in 20,000 Haitians as laborers. Now the Bahaman government is threatening to kick them out.

"I have heard anywhere up to \$1,000 per person" is paid, he said, so that the skipper of a boat or aircraft will arrange to get the Haitians into some remote area, say the Cays, or up closer to the Miami area. They will just then disappear into the woodwork, so to speak.

Jenkins also told the secret session that American and Bahaman lobstermen are feuding over the dwindling supplies of spiny lobster.

"The fishermen of the Bahaman government," he testified, "attempt to force their rights . . . by shotguns and small arms, so they have small skirmishes from time to time in these waters."

Without violating Bahaman waters, the Coast Guard has intervened to stop the gunfighting.