

THE EPIDEMICS OF REPRESSION

In the last two months, outbreaks of epidemics have been reported from various parts of the country. A polio epidemic was feared in Johannesburg's Alexandra Township, many children suffering from measles died in Kwa Zulu hospitals, and there are no signs that the number of deaths from TB in South Africa is on the decrease.

Tuberculosis

It has been reported recently that Cape Town is in the grip of a TB epidemic. About 700 new cases are reported each month, and the figure is increasing. Of those 700, 400 are reported from the area where most of the Crossroads refugees live. (Star 10.7.86)

Treatment for those affected is very difficult in the present political situation. People are afraid to go out and come to the clinics. Clinic attendance rates have dropped markedly since the outbreak of violence in the area.

Measles

In May and June this year, an outbreak of measles in Kwa Zulu reached epidemic proportions. 23 children, most of them under the age of three, died, mainly from complications following the disease. At Ngwelezane Hospital in Empangeni alone, 84 children were admitted for treatment in June.

At St Mary's in Melmoth, 9 children have died.

A spokesperson from Clairwood Hospital in Durban, reports that the 80 to 100 beds in the special fever ward have been constantly occupied by measles patients.

Most health officials who have commented on this issue have blamed the outbreak of the epidemic on the lack of education about immunisation. What they do not mention are the living and working conditions of people, and the inadequate health services and transport facilities in rural areas.

Conditions of overcrowding, inadequate housing and sanitation and malnutrition are the greatest factors in the spread of communicable diseases.

In addition, the nearest health service might be some distance away, and with inadequate transport facilities and the high cost of transport, people might find it difficult to get there to be immunised.