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Probe on imports of 'killer blood'¹⁵

By JOHN HAMSHIRE
GOVERNMENT health experts have begun investigating the possibility that Britain is importing blood products from America contaminated with the killer homosexual disease AIDS.

The action follows the discovery that two men given routine blood transfusions for haemophilia are now seriously ill apparently suffering from the disease.

Disclosure of the men's illness and their treatment at hospitals in Cardiff and London was made exclusively yesterday in the Mail on Sunday.

AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, destroys the body's natural resistance to disease and leaves it vulnerable to repeated attacks from infections and cancer.

It was first discovered among homosexuals in America, who passed it on as blood donors.

The Standing Committee for the Safety of Medicine will be looking particularly into the blood product, Factor Eight, which is derived from donated blood and needed for haemophiliacs to prevent bleeding.

Last night a spokesman for the Department of Health said there was no question of stopping blood product imports.

According to the Department of Health, the advantage of using imported blood products far outweighs the 'slight possibility' that AIDS could be transmitted to patients through Factor Eight.

6 The tragic disease

ILLNESS usually trails behind itself a cloud of legend.

The new killer-disease, AIDS, is no exception.

AIDS — its full medical title is Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome — is a sexually-transmitted disease which appears to have originated among male homosexuals in the United States. It seems to be caused by a virus.

Its effects are traumatic.

The victim's auto-immune system against disease is dramatically lowered or entirely removed, and in many cases he or she dies, not of AIDS itself, but of some disease which AIDS allowed to take over.

A few cases have been reported in Britain — and now, alarmingly, two patients in British hospitals may have acquired it through the transfusion of AIDS-affected blood.

"AIDS is an extraordinary disease," says medical author and researcher, Dr Vernon Coleman.

"In strict medical terms there is no real evidence that it is a disease at all.

"The theory is that the virus enters the victim's system through lesion caused by the act of sex or sometimes through the use of a dirty hypodermic needle used by a drug-taker.

AIDS, however, is NOT now an exclusively homosexually-transmitted disease.

Certainly 72 per cent of

shrouded in mystery

cases in the United States involve homosexuals. But many men who commit homosexual acts also have heterosexual relations with women, who themselves may have sexual relations with other heterosexual men.

This makes AIDS researchers anxious, because it is at this point, they fear, that AIDS could become a more general sexually-transmitted disease than it is at present.

In America, AIDS is NOT yet occurring on a sharply rising scale.

Figures for the second half

of last year give 464 cases diagnosed, of whom 362 were still alive at the end of that period.

In the first quarter of this year, the number of cases was dropping — 161 cases diagnosed, of whom 141 were still alive at the end of March.

These few hundred cases, must, of course, be set against a United States population of around 216 millions.

Nevertheless, the death rate is considerable. A patient who has AIDS for more than two

years has only a twenty per cent chance of survival.

"Part of the trouble is that we are naturally terrified of the unknown," says Dr Coleman.

"There is a danger that it could assume bigger proportions. Travel makes it impossible to isolate ourselves.

"If we could discover exactly what AIDS is — indeed, IF it is — we might be able to do something to counter it."

Douglas Orgill

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