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Study confirms fears on spread of Aids

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Fears that the Aids virus is widespread among homosexuals are confirmed today by the biggest British investigation into the disease so far.

The investigators—teams of doctors from seven centres—also found traces of the virus in a third of haemophiliacs given the blood clotting agent agent, Factor 8: American Factor 8 is strongly implicated.

But, the doctors stress, it seems possible that some of those infected—perhaps even the majority—may not develop the disease.

The number of Aids victims in Britain has risen from 13 in June 1983 to 51 in June this year. By yesterday the Department of Health had confirmed 61 cases, 32 of whom have died. The majority are London homosexuals.

The doctors tested 2,000 people for antibodies to the Aids virus—the tell-tale sign that they had been infected. The results are published in *The Lancet* today.

They found the antibodies in 89 per cent of patients with the Aids-related disease, persistent generalised lymphadenopathy (PGL). It has previously been shown that hundreds of homosexuals are suffering from PGL. The symptoms include swollen glands, night sweats, and general malaise.

Antibodies were also found in 59 per cent of homosexuals with mild symptoms; 42 per cent of homosexuals who were sexual contacts of Aids or PGL sufferers; and in 17 per cent of homosexuals who were supposedly healthy or were being routinely screened for hepatitis.

The doctors say their results confirm that the virus, called HTLV-III and discovered earlier this year, is the cause of Aids and PGL. They found antibodies to it in 30 of their 31 Aids patients; the exception had an usually benign form of the illness.

It is possible that PGL is not, as was previously thought, a pre-Aids condition but a different response to the same infection, the doctors add.

The doctors — from St Mary's Hospital, the Middlesex, St Stephen's, and the Institute of Cancer Research, in London, Withington Hospital, Manchester, and the North London Blood Transfusion Centre — found no trace of the virus in 1,000 blood donors.

They found antibodies in 63 out of 184 haemophiliacs who had been given Factor 8. The fact that no antibodies were found in the British blood donors suggests that the haemophiliacs had been infected by commercial rather than NHS supplies of Factor 8, the doctors point out. Commercial Factor 8 given to haemophiliacs in Britain comes from the US.