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AIDS

Some Background to the
Recent Publicity

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AIDS AND BLOOD TRANSFUSIONSome Background to the Recent Publicity

There has been a lot of publicity about AIDS in the media recently. We thought we should explain something about the disease for donors who are worried about what it may mean for the B.T.S.

What is AIDS?

It is a disease called (A) (I) (D) (S)
Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome which is thought to be caused by an infectious agent, perhaps a virus. So far the cause is unknown. It is a rare disease but it can have serious consequences.

When a person develops AIDS, the body's immune system becomes abnormal. This causes serious risk of potentially fatal infections, including pneumonia, and certain types of cancer.

What are the Symptoms?

Night sweats, fatigue, weight loss, fever, enlargement of lymph glands and recurrent infections are the common symptoms.

Who can get the disease?

AIDS has been occurring, particularly in the USA. The following groups appear to be at risk.

- 1) Men who have multiple partners of the same sex;

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- 2) Intravenous drug abusers;
- 3) Haitian immigrants to USA;
- 4) Haemophiliacs - who may be more susceptible or may become infected by their use of blood products which may have come from a blood donor with AIDS;
- 5) Recipients of blood transfusion;
- 6) Sexual contacts of people at risk to AIDS.

Why these groups are more susceptible to the disease is unknown.

Has AIDS occurred in UK?

The answer is yes. So far only a few cases.

Does this mean the UK is relatively safe?

We do not know. The disease is spreading in the USA and it has not reached UK yet to the same extent.

How can it be Transmitted by Blood Transfusion?

If a blood donor happened to carry the agent responsible for AIDS it is possible to transmit the disease to those not usually at risk. For example, factor VIII (the clotting factor extracted from plasma for treatment of Haemophilia) could have become infected and caused AIDS in a few cases of Haemophilia in USA.

We have not had any definite cases of AIDS in Haemophiliacs in UK. If the clotting factor concentrate (factor VIII) can be infected, then cases could occur in UK because much of the factor VIII is imported to UK from USA.

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The disease cannot be taken lightly. Those getting AIDS may die, because they are more susceptible to serious infections and cancer due to their impaired immune system.

The Blood Transfusion Service is therefore concerned to try and stop any chance of infection spreading by blood transfusion.

Whose Blood Could be a Risk?

All our information concerning at risk groups comes from the USA. However, until more is known about the cause and spread of AIDS, we would ask people in any of the high risk groups described above to avoid giving blood until we have a suitable screening test. Many donors will remember we did this with hepatitis until we had screening tests for the hepatitis virus.

We hope that if we take precautions now, we can prevent the problem of AIDS which has become serious in USA.

Remember it is a rare disease but an important one.

Thank you for your help.

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