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8 OCTOBER 1982

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To: General Medical Practitioners  
District Medical Officers  
District Nursing Officers

Copies to: Regional Medical Officers  
Regional Nursing Officers  
Family Practitioner Committees  
Medical Officers for Environmental Health  
Port and Airport Medical Officers  
Secretaries of the Boards of Governors of the  
Specialist Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals

Dear Doctor/Nursing Officer

HEPATITIS B VACCINE : GUIDANCE ON USE

A vaccine will shortly be available in very limited quantities, which has been shown on initial trials to be effective in the prevention of hepatitis B.

The number of overt cases of hepatitis B identified in England and Wales appears to be low, averaging about 1,000 cases a year. Asymptomatic infections occur and some of those infected become chronic carriers of hepatitis B antigen; a small proportion of antigen carriers develop chronic hepatitis. Certain occupational and other groups are known to be at increased risk of infection although in comparison with other countries, the incidence of the disease is low.

Whether or not to give the vaccine will be for the individual doctor to decide but in view of the relatively low incidence of the disease, the pressures on Health Service resources, the cost of the vaccine and its very limited availability, it is suggested that vaccine should be reserved for specific individuals within the groups known to be at increased risk. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

guided by the Advisory Group on Hepatitis have advised on which groups of staff and patients should receive priority for vaccination, and these are set out in the appendix to this letter.

This vaccination will not attract an item of service payment under the Statement of Fees and Allowances.

Yours sincerely

HENRY YELLOWLEES KCB FRCP FFCM  
Chief Medical Officer

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Chief Nursing Officer

Enquiries to 01-407 5522 Ext. GRO

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