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H/B23/94

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY

To: Regional Health Authorities - for action

Area Health Authorities)
 Boards of Governors)
 Family Practitioner Committees) for information
 Community Health Councils)

November 1976

HEALTH SERVICES DEVELOPMENT
 HEPATITIS B SURFACE ANTIGEN

SUMMARY

This circular encloses the Second Report of the Advisory Group on Testing for the Presence of Hepatitis B Surface Antigen and its Antibody and asks Authorities to arrange for the introduction of revised methods for the testing of blood donations and other blood specimens in accordance with its recommendations.

1. In 1970 an Advisory Group was set up to advise the Secretaries of State for Social Services, for Scotland and for Wales on the testing of blood donations and specimens for what was then known as Australia (hepatitis-associated) Antigen and its Antibody. Its Report was circulated to hospital authorities in June 1971. In May 1972 a revised Report, modified in the light of consultation, was distributed to hospital authorities under cover of HM(72)33 with the request that they arrange for blood donations and other blood specimens to be tested in accordance with its recommendations.

2. At that time the Advisory Group recommended, inter alia, that Regional Transfusion Centres should initially use an immunoelectrosmophoretic method of testing but pointed out that knowledge of the subject was accumulating very rapidly and that the recommendations should therefore be regarded as interim and subject to modification at a later date. The Group has recently completed a review of its previous Report in the light of new information which has become available and has, in its Second Report, made several new recommendations while confirming a number of its previous ones.

3. The Second Report has been accepted by Ministers subject to the reservations set out in paragraph 6 below, and Regional Health Authorities are accordingly asked to follow the revised procedures recommended in the Report. Authorities have already been asked (in DS 326/75) to arrange as soon as possible for all blood donations in their Region to be tested for the presence of hepatitis B surface antigen (HB_sAg) by reversed passive haemagglutination in place of counterimmunoelectrophoresis, if this was not already being done (paragraph 34). This request remains valid but, as this Circular supersedes the letter, DS 326/75 should now be regarded as cancelled.

4. Other important changes in procedure recommended by the Advisory Group include the following:

a. While blood donors whose blood is HB_sAg positive must continue to be permanently excluded from the panel and their donations rejected for clinical use, donors whose blood contains hepatitis B surface antibody (anti-HB_s) may be retained on the panel and their donations used clinically; however, the detection of anti-HB_s should be continued to the extent necessary to obtain sufficient plasma for the preparation of human anti-HB_s immunoglobulin (paragraphs 16 and 17).

b. The practice of permanently excluding from the panel donors with a history of jaundice may be discontinued provided that HB_sAg is not detected by reversed passive haemagglutination (or a test of equal sensitivity) and that the donor has not suffered from hepatitis or jaundice during the previous 12 months (paragraph 18).

5. The Public Health Laboratory Service Board have accepted the recommendations relating to reference work and to the quality control of routine screening tests.

6. The Department is still considering the following recommendations of the Advisory Group:

- a. Paragraph 41, relating to the investigation of hepatitis B surface antigen carriers among medical or paramedical staff.
- b. Paragraph 50, relating to the differential notification of hepatitis.
- c. Paragraph 61, relating to the use of the BIOHAZARD sign on laboratory doors.

Authorities are requested not to take any action on these matters for the time being.

CIRCULARS CANCELLED AND AMENDED

7. HM(72)33 (Australia (hepatitis-associated) Antigen) is cancelled.

8. DS 326/75 (see paragraph 3 of this Circular) is cancelled.

9. HC(76)13 (Personnel. Prescribed and Industrial Diseases: Viral Hepatitis) is amended as follows: Paragraph 7e to read: "HC(76)48 and the Second Report of the Advisory Group on Testing for the Presence of Hepatitis B Surface Antigen and its Antibody."

ACTION

10. Authorities are asked to take action as in paragraphs 3 and 4 of this Circular. The attention of all Consultant Pathologists should be drawn to the Report.

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Further copies of this circular and the report may be obtained (by written request wherever possible please) from: DHSS Store, Scholefield Mill, Brunswick Street, Nelson, Lancs B89 0HU Tel: 0282-62411/2 Ext 17.