



Participant Media Summary

The following media clippings are being shared with Inquiry participants as part of the regular media summary. The clippings will only be available on a temporary basis.

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UK politics**Sunak suffers first Commons defeat in vote over infected blood scandal**

Labour backbencher's move to accelerate compensation plans leads 23 Tory MPs to vote against the government



Rishi Sunak suffered his first Commons defeat despite Tory whips ordering Conservative MPs to vote against a Labour backbencher's amendment to a government bill © Reuters

Rafe Uddin and **Lucy Fisher** in London 11 HOURS AGO

Rishi Sunak suffered his first House of Commons defeat as UK prime minister on Monday, as MPs voted to accelerate plans to compensate victims in a long-running scandal over contaminated blood.

A total of 23 Conservative MPs voted for a Labour backbencher's amendment to the government's victims and prisoners bill to speed up payouts, while dozens more were absent or abstained.

The amendment was approved in the Commons by 246 votes to 242, in a move that should force ministers to set up a compensation scheme next year for the victims and families of those infected with transfusions of contaminated blood.

Tory whips had ordered Conservative MPs to vote against the amendment. Labour whips told their MPs to back it.

Tens of thousands of people, many suffering from haemophilia, a rare blood disorder, were infected with HIV and hepatitis C in the 1970s and 1980s via tainted blood.

Sir Brian Langstaff, chair of a public inquiry into the matter, urged the government in April to establish an arms-length body to pay compensation to victims. He said the government should move swiftly because thousands had already died.

Dame Diana Johnson, the Labour MP who tabled the amendment, said the Commons vote was an “important step forward” for victims. Earlier, she urged MPs to establish a compensation body before the inquiry’s delayed final report is published in March 2024.

Ministers have accepted the “moral case” for compensating families and victims, but are concerned about the cost. Senior government officials previously told the Financial Times the total could reach anywhere [between £5bn and £10bn](#), far higher than the £1bn set aside for postmasters affected by the Horizon IT scandal.

About 1,250 people are thought to have contracted HIV, of whom three-quarters had died by 2020, according to the inquiry. A further 26,800 became seriously ill, while between 2,400 and 5,000 people were infected with hepatitis C.

The public inquiry was announced in 2017 by Theresa May, prime minister at the time. Infected individuals and bereaved partners have so far each received an interim payment of £100,000, leading to payouts of about £400mn.

Edward Argar, prisons minister, speaking to MPs before the vote on Monday, said the government was planning to bring forward its own amendment to the victims and prisoners bill in the House of Lords to deliver a compensation body in line with Johnson’s proposal.

Prior to the vote, the cabinet office also said: “It would not be right to pre-empt the findings of the final report into infected blood, which is due in March 2024. It is right that these findings are published and considered before any legislation is brought forward including any compensation scheme.”

Afterwards, the cabinet office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Johnson’s amendment did not include a particular figure for compensation, and party insiders said the opposition’s support for her proposal did not equate to a spending commitment.

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LEADING ARTICLE

The Times view on blood scandal compensation: Time To Deliver

The government must honour the Commons vote to fast-track long overdue funds to victims of the contaminated blood scandal

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Tuesday December 05 2023, 9.00pm, The Times

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The government has acknowledged the moral case for compensating the victims

IAN DAVIDSON/ALAMY

When the Infected Blood Inquiry formally opened in September 2018, its chairman, Sir Brian Langstaff, promised victims of the scandal that they would be “at the heart of this inquiry”. For those whose lives were touched disastrously by the NHS’s use of

contaminated blood products between 1970 and 1991, that was a powerful promise, not least because in previous decades their suffering had largely met with silence from the state. The tragedy is that so many were no longer alive to hear it: of an estimated 30,000 people in Britain who received these treatments, more than 3,000 have already died as a result.

For the [purposes of the inquiry](#), victims were divided into the “infected” and the “affected”. The former group consisted of those who contracted HIV, hepatitis C, or other serious conditions as a consequence either of blood transfusions or - treatment with unsafe blood products. Many were haemophiliacs given the plasma-derived treatment factor VIII, much of which was imported from the US: there, it was manufactured using paid donors who included those at high risk of blood-borne infections, such as prisoners and drug addicts. There is strong evidence that such hazardous - treatments were given to patients long after medical experts became aware of their probable risks.

The “affected”, in contrast, are [family members who lost loved ones to diseases](#) acquired through hospital treatment. In the course of the inquiry their individual stories have been told, and the immense weight of their trauma revealed. They include cases such as that of Lauren Palmer, whose haemophiliac father contracted HIV after treatment with factor VIII and unwittingly passed the virus on to her mother. As a result Ms Palmer’s parents died within eight days of each other, in 1993, when she was nine years old: she was then separated from her half-brothers and sent to live with another family.

The government has acknowledged the moral case for compensating the victims, and even made interim payments of £100,000 to 4,000 of those [infected and their bereaved partners](#). But it wished to delay setting up a full compensation scheme until the inquiry concludes in March next year. That goes against the recommendation of Sir Brian himself, who called this year for such a scheme to be set up immediately. In the House of Commons on Monday, the government lost the argument. The vote to speed up payments was passed by 246 votes to 242 after 23 Conservative MPs rebelled: it was the government’s first defeat on a whipped vote since the 2019 general election.

In this instance, the rebels were right. Since the necessity for compensation has already been accepted, there is little point in procrastinating, not least because for many victims time is fast

running out: it is estimated that one person affected by the scandal dies every four days. Until 2017, when Theresa May, the prime minister at the time, ordered the inquiry, the official response was characterised by defensiveness and denial. An honourable exception is Lord Owen, who told the inquiry of his efforts as early as 1975 to minimise risks by pressing for Britain to become self- sufficient in blood products. In a worrying - development, he later discovered that his private papers from the era had been destroyed in 1988, without his consent and against protocol.

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There is a price to be paid, of course: the compensation package is likely to be huge, potentially running to £20 billion, and falls at an economically difficult time. One might certainly wish that previous governments had faced up to their responsibilities earlier. But that is not the fault of the blameless victims of this scandal, who have been badly failed not only by the pharmaceutical and medical establishments, but also the political one. Let us not fail them again: justice has been - delayed, and denied, for far too long.

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