

WHY IS A LEAFLET ON AIDS NECESSARY?

Recently there has been considerable publicity in the newspapers and on radio and television about a new, serious, but rare disease called AIDS.

Since AIDS may be transmitted by transfusion of blood and blood products, the National Blood Transfusion Service wants blood donors to have the facts about the disease.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS is short for Acquired Immune Deficiency Sndrome. As its name implies, AIDS destroys the body's immune system which normally protects against infections and other illnesses. A person with the disease is therefore at risk of developing serious infections such as pneumonia, or even cancer. AIDS is probably caused by a virus, but this is not known for certain.

WHO IS AT RISK FROM AIDS?

Most of the information about AIDS has come from the USA where in the past two years or so, approximately 1,450 patients have been found to be suffering from the disease. Certain groups of people appear to be particularly susceptible; these are:

1. Homosexual men who have many different partners.
2. Drug addicts, male and female, using injections.
3. Sexual contacts of people suffering from AIDS.

It has also been found in a number of immigrants to the USA from the island of Haiti.

Patients with AIDS also seem more likely to have suffered, at some time, from various other diseases such as hepatitis B, syphilis or other sexually transmitted diseases.

HAS AIDS OCCURRED IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

Yes, a few cases have been reported, although nothing like as many as in the USA. No-one knows whether more people in the United Kingdom will develop AIDS and a careful watch is being kept for possible cases.

CAN AIDS BE TRANSMITTED BY TRANSFUSION OF BLOOD AND BLOOD PRODUCTS?

Almost certainly yes, but there is only the most remote chance of this happening with ordinary blood transfusions given in hospital. However, in the USA about twelve patients suffering from haemophilia, an illness in which the blood will not clot, have developed AIDS. Haemophiliacs are more susceptible to AIDS because they need regular injections of a product called Factor VIII. This is made from plasma obtained from many donors. Should just one of the donors be suffering from AIDS, then the Factor VIII could transmit the disease.

HOW CAN THE RISKS BE REDUCED?

At present, there is no screening test the Transfusion Service can use to detect people with AIDS. So, until there is and until more is

known about this disease, donors are requested not to give blood if they think they may either have the disease or be at risk from it.

WILL DONORS BE QUESTIONED ON SEXUAL MATTERS WHEN THEY ATTEND
TO GIVE BLOOD?

DEFINITELY NOT.

The National Blood Transfusion Service has a very high regard for donors as extremely responsible people who give blood for the benefit of others and is confident that they would not knowingly put patients at risk from such a serious disease.

WHERE CAN DONORS OBTAIN FURTHER INFORMATION ON AIDS?

Any donor can discuss in confidence whether to give blood, with the doctor on the blood collection session, their own doctor or the Director of their local Blood Transfusion Centre.

Please remember, AIDS is a rare disease but a serious one.