

DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

COUNTERING THE SPREAD OF AIDS IN SCOTLAND

Outlining action being taken in Scotland to counter the spread of AIDS Mr John MacKay, Minister for Health and Social Work at the Scottish Office said,

"To date there have been 6 cases of AIDS in Scotland 2 of whom have died out of a UK total of 206 (114 deaths). Although these numbers are relatively small I am in no way seeking to minimise the serious nature of this disease. I am indeed determined that we shall do all we can to control its spread.

"We are working in close cooperation with the other UK Health Departments and, like them, have had the benefit of learning from the experience of the United States where more than 12,000 cases have occurred. Although knowledge of the disease is progressing rapidly there is still no cure for AIDS nor a vaccine which protects against the virus. We must therefore do all we can to control its spread.

"Health Education in Scotland for the groups at risk to minimise the spread of the virus and for the general public to ensure their understanding of the disease is of prime importance as is the screening of blood donations and the routine testing of blood for the presence of antibody to the AIDS virus. In addition to the £1 million provided to combat the disease in England and Wales funds totalling nearly £380,000 have been made available in Scotland in the current financial year to fight the disease.

will - not really.

"I am keenly aware of the public's concern about AIDS and would take this opportunity to reassure them that in Scotland, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, the disease is being tackled on a broad front. With the continued cooperation of those in the main risk groups I hope we will be able to control the spread of the disease; and I welcome the support of the press and media in ensuring that the general public continue to be well informed about it."

Notes for Editors

Listed below are the major measures already taken in Scotland to control the spread of AIDS in the area of:-

Health Education

1. The main at-risk groups are homosexual and bisexual men; intravenous drug abusers; haemophiliacs who have received contaminated blood products; and the sexual contacts of people in these groups. Information leaflets have been produced by the Scottish Health Education Group, Scottish AIDS Monitor and the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service, (SNBTS), the last warning those in the at-risk groups not to give blood.

Screening of Blood Donations

2. The risk of contracting AIDS from a blood transfusion is already extremely small, but the planned introduction of a screening test by the

SNBTS will reduce this risk still further. The commercially available screening tests have been evaluated by a panel of experts from the Public Health Laboratory Service on behalf of DHSS and two kits are now being tested in the SNBTS, who are to begin routine screening of all blood donations as from mid- October.

Other Blood Testing

3. Health Boards have been asked to arrange and publicise NHS facilities for taking and testing blood specimens from persons who think they might have been infected. The aim of this facility which is also being introduced as from mid-October is to ensure that the Blood Transfusion Service is concerned only with testing the blood of genuine donors. Where the initial test (whether by the NHS or by the SNBTS) proves positive a confirmatory test will be undertaken.

Heat Treatment of Blood Products

4. All Scottish produced Factor VIII (a blood clotting agent needed by haemophiliacs) in which Scotland is self-sufficient, is heat treated thus greatly reducing the risk of transmitting the AIDS virus to haemophiliacs.

Counselling

5. Anyone whose blood is found to contain antibodies to the AIDS virus will be offered counselling and Health Boards have been asked to make the necessary arrangements. Some counselling is also being undertaken

by Scottish AIDS Monitor a voluntary organisation being financially assisted by the Scottish Home and Health Department (see below). Courses for counsellors are being held at St Mary's Hospital in London on which some places are being made available to Scotland; a course is also being mounted by St Mary's in Scotland.

Research

6. The Government-funded Medical Research Council is coordinating a number of important research projects costing nearly £370,000. The MRC also maintains valuable links with researchers working in the United States and elsewhere.

Information for Doctors

7. General information on the diagnosis of the disease and infection control measures has been issued by SHHD to all doctors, including guidelines relating to the care of AIDS patients in hospital, and on the handling of blood specimens and secretions.

Cooperation with the Voluntary Sector

8. SHHD is grant-aiding Scottish AIDS Monitor to support its work on AIDS at the rate of £6,000 per annum (in addition to an initial one off capital grant of £1,000 for office equipment) in the current financial year.

Expert Advisory Group on AIDS

9. Scotland is represented on this group whose sub-groups work on various topics such as counselling and blood testing and give advice on the policies to adopt.

Monitoring

10. Monitoring in Scotland is undertaken by the Communicable Disease (Scotland) Unit (CD(S)U) which is based at Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow. It reports to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC), which is part of the PHLS and which began national surveillance of AIDS in 1982. They have close contact with similar centres in other countries including the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States and the WHO AIDS Collaborating Centre for Europe in Paris.

Overall Funding

11. So far in Scotland alone the Government have contributed £377,500 towards the fight against AIDS, ie:

£322,000 - for purchase of screening test kits for use in the SNBTS

£51,000 - for confirmatory AIDS antibody testing (at the Virology Reference Laboratory, Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow and the Clinical Virology Laboratory at Edinburgh University)

£4,500 - grant to Scottish AIDS Monitor in 1985/86

£377,500