

GRO-C

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MESSAGE FROM DR J HETTERS, DEPUTY CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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**FURTHER PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES ON BLOOD PRODUCTS
ANNOUNCED**

Further precautionary measures to protect patients against the theoretical risk of contracting new variant CJD from blood products were announced today.

The action follows three recalls of blood products last November because donors contributing to the plasma used in them subsequently developed nvCJD. It was made clear then that the Government would follow the recommendations of the relevant scientific committees to maximise the safety of the blood supply.

The further precautionary measures were announced after advice today from the UK Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM), which considered all the current data, including the conclusions of this week's Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP). The CSM advice effectively signals a review of the use of UK-sourced plasma, a component of blood used in the manufacture of a variety of blood products. The CSM will accordingly be looking at all products individually to ensure a safe and sufficient supply of blood products to the NHS.

The CSM also advised an extension of blood product recalls to include donors subsequently identified as being strongly suspected of having nvCJD. Previous recalls were based on confirmed cases only.

THE MEASURES RECOMMENDED BY THE CSM ARE PRECAUTIONARY. They do NOT mean that UK blood and blood products are unsafe. DOCTORS, HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND PATIENTS CAN CONTINUE TO USE UK SOURCED PRODUCTS WITH CONFIDENCE. There is no evidence to show that nvCJD can be transmitted via blood products or blood - the risk remains theoretical only.

Some blood products may now be manufactured from imported plasma including the clotting agent Factor VIII, used in the treatment of haemophilia, immunoglobulins which are used in the treatment of a range of diseases such as tetanus and the prevention of haemolytic disease of the newborn, and albumin, used in the treatment of burns and serious accidents, and as a stabiliser in some vaccines. VACCINES CURRENTLY USED IN THE UK CHILDHOOD IMMUNISATION PROGRAMME DO NOT CONTAIN UK ALBUMIN.

The action is supported by all the UK Chief Medical Officers.

WHOLE BLOOD, USED IN BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS, IS NOT AFFECTED BY TODAY'S MEASURES but as a further precautionary measure, the National Blood Authority has already been instructed to prepare a strategy for the possible removal of white blood cells from donations by the process of leucodepletion, should it be required.

There is absolutely no question of any risk to blood donors of contracting HIV through the donation process. Donated blood is vital to the work of the NHS and all donors are urged to continue their life-saving work.

The outcome of a review of the NHS's provision of the blood product Factor VIII, used in the treatment of haemophilia, was also announced today.

The NHS Executive will now be writing to all health authorities setting out arrangements to ensure that recombinant Factor VIII is made available to those children under the age of 16 who are not already receiving it, and to new patients.

If you have any queries about this message further information can be obtained from Dr Mike McGovern (Tel: GRO-C) or Miss Christine Corrigan (Tel: GRO-C). Both are at Department of Health, Wellington House, 135-155 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UG.
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