

draft press release

MINISTERS ACCEPT SEAC ADVICE ON SAFETY OF BLOOD AND BLOOD PRODUCTS

Ministers have today accepted advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) on possible precautionary steps to protect recipients of blood and blood products from any possible risk of contracting new variant CJD (nvCJD).

SEAC's advice was also considered by the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues (MSBT) and Ministers have taken account of their views in their response.

Announcing the Government's decision the Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, said:

"The Government will continue to take whatever scientifically necessary action is practicable to protect the public from any risk of contracting nvCJD.

The Government accepts the advice it has received from SEAC and the MSBT and I have therefore asked the Department's Director of Research and Development, Professor Swales, to commission an assessment of the risks of human to human transmission of nvCJD through blood and blood products. Meantime, I have instructed the National Blood Authority (NBA) to start work towards the possible extension of leucodepletion of blood in order that they are prepared in the event that the risk assessment indicates that this would be a sensible precautionary measure.

The Government will publish the results of the risk assessment and their response as soon as they are available.

Mr Dobson added:

"In line with advice from the European expert Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP) that plasma derived blood products identified from nvCJD donors should be recalled as a precautionary measure, the UK has recalled products from two donors within the last week. We are pleased that the NBA have been able to complete so quickly the exercise to trace donations made by donors who were subsequently confirmed as having developed nvCJD.

These are purely precautionary measures. No-one who needs treatment with blood or blood products should have any hesitation about accepting it; any risk of nvCJD will be far outweighed by the risks of damaging health through not doing so.

Blood donors are not at any risk. The gift of blood is a very precious one which is invaluable to the health service and to the health of patients.

A copy of the advice received from SEAC is attached.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

[DN - can PPD indicate what they require here please?]