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Health Minister announces additional Infected Blood Payments

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Health Minister Robin Swann has announced additional payments for people affected by contaminated blood.

The payments range from around £3,000 to £6,700 and will be made to those people on the Northern Ireland Infected Blood Payment Scheme who were diagnosed with Hepatitis C or HIV after receiving NHS-supplied infected blood.



Announcing the additional one-off payments, which bring the Northern Ireland scheme into line with the scheme in England for 2019/20, Health Minister Robin Swann said:

“Having met with a number of people who have been either directly infected or affected by contaminated blood, I was appalled at the suffering that they have had to endure. They have experienced significant and negative effects on family life, careers and education.

"I am very aware of the hurt the divergence with England has caused here in Northern Ireland. When I made the announcement in January I was not in a position to make the full allocation at that point as I wanted to carefully consider how best to meet the needs of our beneficiaries.

"However, I made a commitment that further support would be provided before the end of this financial year. I am now in a position to deliver on that commitment.

"At this time of great uncertainty and challenge for our health and social care system, and for our entire community as we tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, I am pleased that I can deliver some positive news for a group of people who have suffered so much. Now, more than ever, we must do all that we can to help and bring comfort to those who need it the most."

In addition to the payments to those infected individuals on the scheme, the Minister has also announced that he will make a one-off payment of £5,000 to all 17 non-infected widows and widowers who are part of the Northern Ireland Infected Blood Payment Scheme.

Minister Swann continued: **"I have been struck by the impact on the loved ones of those infected by contaminated blood. That is why I wanted to include payments to the bereaved. Many women and men in Northern Ireland have struggled financially as a result of contaminated blood. That financial struggle has continued after their loved ones passed away as most were unable to get life insurance or were not entitled to a pension."**

The interim payments form phase 1 of a three-phase approach to reviewing financial support in Northern Ireland. The second phase of the review will address other financial aspects of the scheme. Discussions are continuing between officials in the four UK countries on how to achieve greater parity across the different UK support schemes, taking

account of local circumstances and beneficiaries' needs in Northern Ireland.

Further reform of the scheme will be required to address recommendations from the UK-wide Infected Blood Inquiry, chaired by Sir Brian Langstaff. It is due to deliver its report in 2021.

The Minister added: **"Consideration now needs to be given to how this issue can be sustainably resolved going forward. I am committed to a wider ongoing review of all the support provided to those affected in Northern Ireland. I want to make sure all aspects of our support scheme best meet the needs of our people.**

"I am committed to ensuring that our beneficiaries continue to have proper access to the financial assistance that they need in order to mitigate the harms and allow them to live as normal a life as possible."

Notes to editors:

1. Before heat treatment of blood products was introduced in 1985, and a test for hepatitis C was developed and introduced in 1991, 4,675 people with haemophilia in the UK were infected with hepatitis C as a result of NHS-supplied blood products during the 1970s and 1980s.

Epidemiological estimates suggest that up to 28,000 others may have been similarly infected with hepatitis C by whole blood transfusions in the UK.

2. Over the same period, approximately 1,200 people with haemophilia and 100 other individuals were infected with HIV by NHS-supplied blood products or blood transfusions in the UK before the introduction of heat treatment of blood products, and the development and introduction of a test for HIV in 1985. Some of these patients were co-infected with both hepatitis C and HIV. It is estimated that up to 3,000 of these people have died of their infections.

3. Since 2017, each UK country has had its own infected blood payment scheme. Details of the NI scheme were announced in December 2016 – further information is available on the DoH (NI) website

at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/michelle-oneill-announces-improved-financial-support-people-affected-by-contaminated-blood>

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4. The NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme is administered on behalf of the Department of Health NI by the Business Services Organisation (BSO). Further information on the scheme is available on NI Direct at:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/infected-blood-payment-scheme>

(<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/infected-blood-payment-scheme>)

5. Regular payments were made at the same level in Northern Ireland and England until April 2019, when the UK Government announced significant increases which created a divergence with Northern Ireland.

6. A UK-wide public inquiry, the Infected Blood Inquiry, chaired by Sir Brian Langstaff, started work in September 2018 and is expected to be completed in 2021. For more information, visit the Infected Blood Inquiry website at: <https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/>

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7. For media enquiries please contact the Department of Health Press Office team on 028 9052 0575 or email pressoffice@health-ni.gov.uk.

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