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THE TIMES

Doctors asked to report Aids cases

By Our Science Editor

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The seriousness with which doctors in Britain view the emergence of the mysterious disease known as Aids, an acronym of autoimmune deficiency syndrome, is reflected in this week's issues of *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*.

A preliminary survey from the Government's Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre reports five deaths in England and Wales and nine other cases reported by specialist hospital departments.

The report urges doctors to inform the centre as soon as possible when a patient with Aids comes under their care so that an up-to-date picture can be maintained of the extent and spread pattern of the disease.

Since it came into public prominence in the United States in 1981, Aids has afflicted more than 1,300 Americans. More than half of those were stricken in the past year. There is no cure for the condition, which has a high

mortality rate and includes a whole range of virulent infections.

The condition was thought at first to be restricted to homosexuals because it broke out almost simultaneously among homosexuals in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Initially it was believed to have been caused because the body's natural defence system was almost battered down by repeated infection, by a group of viruses belonging to the herpes family, through drug abuse and sexually transmitted disease.

But that has been ruled out because cases among other adults and children are coming to light which are not connected with that pattern. In addition, the disease is no longer confined to the United States or to men.

The most sinister features of the condition are the number of infectious agents which have been identified in patients. It appears to be communicable primarily by physical contact.

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