

**Streetstyle**

Free  
show ticket 28



**Education**

The schools' perks guide  
With four pages of jobs 31-34

**Andrew Marr and  
Hamish McRae:**

The feel-grumpy factor 21

**Family life online**

The Internet in  
your living room 25

**Move or  
improve**

See page 37

**30p**



# THE INDEPENDENT

2,521

Thursday 17 November 1994

## Government resists calls to compensate hepatitis C victims

BY NICHOLAS TIMMINS  
and MARTIN WHITFIELD

Health ministers yesterday resisted cross-party calls for compensation for haemophiliacs who have contracted hepatitis C from contaminated blood products, amid controversy over how many people may be infected by the virus.

Estimates of the number of people carrying the virus ranged from 9,000 to more than 500,000. A pioneering study of current intrave-

nous drug users found that 60 per cent had been affected.

The *Independent* revealed yesterday that 12 British men with haemophilia had died from hepatitis C within the past year. More than 2,000 are believed to have contracted the virus and the figure could be as high as 90 per cent of the 3,122 of haemophiliacs who received the anti-clotting agent Factor VIII before 1986.

Alf Morris, the former Labour Minister for the Disabled, said the

principle was exactly the same as that which led to a £42m pay-out in 1990 to 1,200 haemophiliacs who became infected with HIV, the Aids virus, after being given contaminated Factor VIII. But Gerry Malone, the Minister for Health, said: "It would be wrong to embark on a system of compensation unless negligence has been proved by those who have been treated in some way or another. That is a principle by which we will stand." Those infected by HIV had been a special

case, suffering social as well as clinical problems. "Some people were deprived of their employment, they were not able to obtain mortgages, insurance, things like that."

A further 3,000 non-haemophiliac patients could have received infection through blood transfusions before a screening test was introduced by the National Blood Authority in 1991. Hepatitis C was only identified positively in 1989.

The Haemophilia Society said it had no plans to seek compensation

from the Government at the moment. "It is far too early to say what the needs of people of people with haemophilia and hepatitis C will be. Our priority is to ensure help and support for people who are unwell as a result of hepatitis C," it said.

Hepatitis C, a chronic liver condition, can take up to 20 years to develop and many of those infected show no symptoms for long periods. About 20 per cent are thought to go on to suffer from liver disease.

The British Liver Society warned

that up to 500,000 people could be infected and called for government-funded research into the virus. "The treatment for hepatitis C is not particularly successful and we must have the funds urgently to develop proper treatment regimes," Alison Rogers, the society's director, said.

John Marshall, the Conservative MP for Hendon South, one of the leading campaigners for compensation, said what was at stake was a moral, not legal, issue. "The paral-

els with the HIV compensation are very strong indeed. What has happened in both is that a treatment designed to improve the quality of life has become a suspended sentence of death. That is not what people receive treatment from the NHS for. No one is arguing that the Government has been negligent, but it has to answer at the bar of public opinion, not the bar of law, and the former is more powerful."

Drug victims, page 3  
Leading article, page 19