

Mr. Creagh
for Bill/S

Department of Health
and Social Security

PRESS RELEASE

Alexander Fleming House
Elephant and Castle
London SE1 6BY

Telephone 01-407 5522

85/166

27 June 1985

AIDS BLOOD TEST SOON TO BE AVAILABLE

Kenneth Clarke, Minister for Health, announced today that an AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) blood test would be introduced within the next few months.

In a written reply to a Parliamentary Question from John Butterfill, MP for Bournemouth West, Mr Clarke said: "I am pleased to say that a test will be introduced within the next few months to screen all blood given by blood donors for antibodies to the virus which causes AIDS. Arrangements will also be made for Sexually Transmitted Diseases clinics to provide an AIDS test for people who fear they may have been exposed to the disease.

"I understand and share the concern to get these tests in use as soon as possible. However we must have tests which are accurate and can be trusted. A number of test kits are already available and in use abroad but reports from those countries suggest that the tests are not entirely reliable. We believe that no test should be introduced in the UK until its reliability has been established. There is no point in introducing a test which often fails to detect antibodies in blood or detects antibodies where there are none. An evaluation programme is being undertaken by the Public Health Laboratory Service and National Blood Transfusion Service experts as a matter of urgency. It is essential to complete this programme if we are to have a sensible policy that really does protect the public. Contrary to reports in today's press no decisions on choice of test kits have yet been made. We hope that we will be able to introduce a test within four to five months. We are also making arrangements to offer counselling to anyone whose blood is found to be positive.

"We expect that the number of blood donors found to have antibodies is likely to be very small. The risk of contracting AIDS from receiving a blood

transfusion remains extremely small and screening will reduce this risk still further. There is no risk at all to those giving blood of contracting AIDS."

NOTE TO EDITORS

The Government has provided funds of over £57,000 to enable the PHLS to carry out a full evaluation of all the test kits which are currently available. A further £750,000 will be provided for PHLS to set up laboratory facilities to confirm the results of any blood donations found positive and to test the samples taken in STD clinics.