

PRESS RELEASE

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DATE SET FOR AIDS SCREENING TEST

John Patten, Parliamentary Secretary for Health, today announced that routine screening of all blood donations for antibodies to the AIDS virus should be introduced by mid-October.

Following the initial evaluation of these tests by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) the National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS) is urgently carrying out its own evaluation of two of the test kits. Both these evaluations have been funded by the DHSS at a cost of over £130,000. Other countries are interested in the results of the evaluation work.

The NBTS is already making preparations for the introduction of routine screening. Laboratory space is being provided, staff are familiarising themselves with the test kits and being trained in their use. Procedures for handling the test results and counselling those found positive, including the need to preserve confidentiality, have now been agreed.

Mr Patten said: "It is important that we reduce the risk of AIDS being spread through blood transfusions and blood products. This risk is already extremely small but screening all blood donations will reduce it still further.

"This is just one of the steps we are taking to control the spread of AIDS. Health authorities have been asked to make alternative arrangements, outside the NBTS to provide testing for people who may be worried that they have been infected with the virus. The PHLS has been given an extra £750,000 to provide laboratory facilities for this testing."

The Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (part of PHLS) continues to monitor the spread of the disease in the UK. It receives reports on AIDS cases and people found to be HTLV III antibody positive.

NOTE TO EDITORS The two test kits which are currently being evaluated are those produced by Wellcome and Organon Teknika. Other test kits may be evaluated in due course.