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PRESS RELEASE

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86/40

11 February 1986

FIRST RESULTS OF SCREENING BLOOD FOR AIDS

Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Social Services, announced today that the Blood Transfusion Services in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland tested 593,393 donations for antibody to HTLV III, the AIDS virus, up to the end of December 1985. Of these, 13 donors were found to be HTLV III antibody positive and their donations were withdrawn.

Speaking on behalf of the Health Departments Mr Fowler said: "I would like to thank any volunteers who considered themselves to be in the high risk groups for AIDS and refrained from giving blood as requested. I would also like to emphasise that we need a steady increase in the number of blood donations during 1986 as part of the drive towards achieving self-sufficiency in blood products. I therefore wish to thank regular donors for their continuing support and hope that many others will come forward to follow their example."

Dr Harold Gunson, responsible for co-ordinating the information on behalf of the Blood Transfusion Service, said today that the incidence of infection as shown by these figures, at .002 per cent is much lower than that reported from the USA. Of the 13 donors with positive results, ten were from recognised high risk groups. Dr Gunson will be addressing a conference on AIDS in Newcastle tomorrow.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Testing of all blood donations for antibody to the HTLV III virus began on 14 October 1985.

2. The groups most at risk of contracting AIDS are:

- homosexual and bisexual men
- drug abusers, both men and women, who inject drugs
- haemophiliacs who have been treated with blood products
- sexual contacts of people in these groups

These are listed in the leaflet "AIDS. Important information for blood donors".

3. All UK Factor VIII - the blood clotting agent needed by haemophiliacs - has been heat treated since April 1985 to kill off the AIDS virus. All imported Factor VIII is also heat treated.