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# Extra £30m could , have kept out Aids

By Andrew Veitch,  
Medical Correspondent

Health ministers in Britain were warned two years ago of the danger of importing contaminated blood products from the US, but they refused to put enough money into NHS services to make Britain self-sufficient.

As concern grew yesterday over supplies of Factor VIII—a blood-clotting agent for haemophiliacs — contaminated with Aids, the disease which has killed more than a thousand US homosexuals, the head of Britain's biggest transfusion centre said that without extra funds it would be at least two years before Britain could halt imports.

The warning of infected supplies came in February 1981 after Factor VIII contaminated with hepatitis had been given to 10 children at a special school in Alton, Hampshire.

The Department of Health admitted at the time that there

was a risk of infection. However the then Health Minister, Dr Gerard Vaughan, claimed that the £1,290,000 the Government was investing in the Blood Products Laboratory at Eltree, Hertfordshire, would solve the problem.

He was told by Mr Reg Bird, of ASTMS, the union representing technicians at the laboratory, that self-sufficiency would cost £30 million and that until that money was provided people would be at risk from blood sold for up to £7 a pint to private agencies in the US, and imported into Britain at a cost of £10 million a year.

The Blood Products Laboratory will need more blood from the regional transfusion services if it is to produce more agents like Factor VIII, and albumin, for burns victims. Transfusion experts estimated yesterday that an immediate injection of only £3 million might be enough to enable health authorities to col-

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lect and provide the extra blood.

Dr Keith Rogers, director of the south London Blood Centre, said yesterday: "We are not likely to be self-sufficient for another two years, possibly longer."

The regional health authorities would have to support the Blood Products Laboratory, but the Government's constraints on NHS finance meant that the money would have to come from savings in other areas, he said.

Two British haemophiliacs are suspected of contracting Aids — acquired immune deficiency syndrome — from imported Factor VIII. Three cases have been reported from Spain, 11 in the US, and others have been traced in France.

No cases of Aids infection after treatment with albumin have been reported. However, the disease can be transmitted in whole fresh blood and is not killed by standard radiation techniques. The latest reported victim is a two-year-old boy in San Francisco who was given transfusions within days of birth because he was a rhesus baby. He fell ill four months later, subsequently died, and one of the blood donors turned out to be an Aids victim himself.

Aids kills by depressing the defences against disease probably by affecting white cells called T lymphocytes. Sufferers die of multiple infections, including herpes, pneumonia, and hepatitis. Many also fall victim to the hitherto rare skin cancer, Kaposi's Sarcoma.

A virus is suspected, but has not been identified. Blood donors may not know that they are carrying the disease, because it takes months to develop. There is no means of testing blood for the presence of Aids, nor of killing the mysterious agent.

A plea for British homosexuals not to donate blood now seems likely. Dr Rogers said yesterday: "The most sensible thing we can do to minimise the risk of transmitting it from British donors is to persuade homosexuals not to give blood."

"It would need a publicity campaign by the Department of Health, but it could be achieved, and I do not think we would notice any great difference in supplies. Homosexuals represent a small group, and only 3 per cent of the whole population donate blood."