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EXCLUSIVE: Virus imported from U.S.

Hospitals

By SUSAN DOUGLAS
 Medical Correspondent

BLOOD imported by the NHS from America could be threatening the lives of thousands of British people.

A sexually transmitted killer disease, which has struck more than 1,300 Americans, is present in contaminated blood used in transfusions and operations.

Experts revealed exclusively to The Mail on Sunday that two men in hospital in London and Cardiff are suspected to be suffering from the disease after routine transfusions for haemophilia.

Warning

The disease is called AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. First discovered among homosexuals, it was dubbed 'The Gay Plague' in America. They have passed it on as blood donors.

Its discovery here prompted the British Blood Products Laboratories, suppliers of all hospitals and clinics in England and Wales, to consider sending out a warning, stating that their products could not be guaranteed free from AIDS.

Blood imported from America, said Norman Pettet of the laboratories, is used in transfusions for Britain's 4,500 haemophiliacs as well as for millions of patients requiring major surgery after road accidents and severe burns.

'Extracts from American blood are used to immunise children against things like chicken pox and hepatitis. And fractions are used in the treatment of leukaemia.'

Emergency

Screening in America is less stringent than here. Anyone can donate blood for between £5 and £7 a pint. But some exporters are now taking precautions by banning drug-users and homosexuals.

Directors of Britain's blood transfusion centres and the 110 haemophiliac clinics have called emergency meetings to discuss immediate action.

They are questioning why Britain

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Using killer blood

imports from the U.S. up to 70 per cent of plasma and blood extracts.

Dr Tony Pinching, immunologist at St Mary's Hospital, London, said: 'It seems madness that our blood supplies are coming from a country suffering from an epidemic of an incurable killer disease that nobody can even test for.'

The Swiss Red Cross, chief producer in Switzerland of the anti-clotting factor needed by haemophiliacs, said this weekend they would welcome requests from Britain for 'clean' plasma.

But health authorities here consider such measures only a stop-gap. By 1986 they hope Britain will be self-sufficient in blood and all its side products.

Many doctors feel 1986 will be too late now that the killer disease which knocks

Spread of the 'Gay Plague'

AIDS started as the Gay Plague, afflicting young men in the over-crowded homosexual ghettos of downtown New York and San Francisco.

But by summer 1981 doctors were beginning to find other victims of the deadly disease they could not understand — or treat.

Now American authorities list 1,361 — from all walks of life and including men, women and 20 children. So far 520 people have died.

Symptoms are fever, weight loss, swollen lymph glands and a fatal skin cancer.

(CONT)

out the body's own defence mechanisms, has crossed the Atlantic.

There are growing fears that our own blood banks have been infected already by British donors who have picked up the deadly AIDS virus.

Statistics, criticised for understating the problem, list only 14 cases — with five deaths, including two women.

But Professor John Hobbs at the Westminster Hospital, London, says he has seen 50 in his wards and has 14 patients with the disease at present.