

Ten sick after Factor 8 doses

By CATHERINE STEVEN

TEN children who suffer from haemophilia and attend a special school suffered headaches and dizziness after being treated with Factor 8, a product of human blood plasma imported from America.

The children, aged between 9 and 14, are treated regularly at the school at Alton, Hampshire with Factor 8 to stop bleeding.

The side effects have heightened fears of the "constant risk" for Britain's 4,000 registered haemophiliacs of infection from blood products made by commercial companies who use paid blood donors to collect the plasma.

Some of the blood used to make the products to treat haemophiliacs is said to be bought in Mexico and South America for the "market price" of £5 a pint.

Imports worth an estimated £10 million of Factor 8, the missing factor in a haemophiliac's blood, come from America, Germany and Austria in powdered form to supplement the limited amount made in Britain.

Last month Sir George Young, Under Secretary of State in the Department of Health, gave warning of the "possible risks of hepatitis" from imported products, particularly from those made from plasma supplied by paid donors.

Britain cannot make the 60 million units of Factor 8 needed to treat its haemophiliacs because not enough plasma is available through the National Blood Transfusion Service and cash is also short.

The ten children affected by sickness last month attend a special school attached to the Lord Mayor Treloar College at Alton. They complained of headaches after being given foreign made Factor 8 to stop bleeding, but recovered quite quickly.

Doses, which cost about 10p a unit, are injected after being mixed with water. One treatment could cost more than £40.

Dr Tony Aronstam, the school's director, who relies on foreign companies to provide two-thirds of the needs of the school's 40 boys, immediately

cancelled all orders of Factor 8 supplied by a Nottingham company which imported the product from America. "We considered the batch was contaminated in some way", he said.

Mr David Heath, managing director of Speywood Laboratories, which sells principally American-prepared doses of Factor 8, said: "A bunch of children complained of a headache. We checked with six other units supplied from the same batch and no one complained of anything."

Mr Heath, whose company is testing plasma from pigs and cows to make Factor 8, admitted that there were some risks with imported products, particularly from strains of hepatitis for which there are no known tests.

"But if we did away with this material from abroad we would have a lot of dead haemophiliacs on our hands," he said.

A second "suspect batch" of Factor 8 was found in Oxford last month. About a dozen people, including teenagers, who regularly attend the Haemophilia Centre attached to the Churchill Hospital, Oxford—one of Britain's main research centres—complained of similar symptoms after being given Factor 8 made in America.

The Oxford centre is one of three in Britain which make Factor 8, but its output is only three million units a year. The policy of the director, Dr Charles Rizza, is to use "home-produced" Factor 8 to treat children or new patients.

He said: "I believe the National Health Service-made product is cleaner. It is obtained from a smaller pool of donors and there may be less risk of infections."

"But it has to be said that there is still some risk, such

The main British production centre is the Health Department's Blood Products Laboratory at Elstree, Hertfordshire, which makes 15 million units a year.

as symptoms of headaches, with British-produced Factor 8, although we do not have a paid donor system." There might be a greater degree of risk from commercial products, Dr Rizza said.

The National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, which tests all foreign blood products imported by Britain, rejects a "small amount," believed to be about 5 per cent, of the millions of bottles of Factor 8 brought in each year.

Companies operating in Britain maintain that stringent tests are carried out to a higher standard than those made in British blood product laboratories.