

AIDS: transfusion patients may be at risk

AMERICAN scientists are scouring the country for the first case of the bizarre disease "acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome" (AIDS) in patients who have undergone major surgery.

The hunt for the cause of the disease, which was first diagnosed among male homosexuals, has now labelled as a prime suspect some unknown blood-borne virus.

In just one year the list of people at risk from AIDS has lengthened from male homosexuals, drug-abusers and Haitians, to include the entire population.

In the last year a task force under Dr Harold Jaffe at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia has found seven cases of

AIDS among haemophiliacs who do not fall into any of the other categories. Jaffe believes that the spread of the disease may be connected with new preparations of factor VIII concentrate—the blood-clotting agent given to haemophiliacs—which are made up from blood from large numbers of donors, rather than one individual.

If this is correct, any patient in hospital who is given a blood transfusion could be at risk if one of the donors of the blood carries the virus.

No cases of AIDS among British haemophiliacs have been reported so far—even though 50 per cent of the factor VIII used in Britain comes from the US. Omar Sattar