

From The Chief Medical Officer:
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HSS(MD)27/2002

To: Chief Executives, HSS Boards and Trusts
Medical Directors, HSS Trusts, for onward distribution to relevant clinical directors
Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service
Regional Virus Laboratory, Royal Victoria Hospital
Directors of Public Health
Director, CDSC

18 October 2002

Dear Colleague

TESTING OF TISSUE DONORS FOR HTLV VIRUS

At its meeting on 25th June 2002, the Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissue, (DOH), recommended that testing of all **new** tissue donors for the human T-cell leukaemia virus (HTLV) should be introduced as soon as practicable. Further advice is being sought on:

- the advisability of testing of stored tissue samples
- the need to test donors of ophthalmic tissues
- the testing of organ donors.

BACKGROUND

Human T-cell leukaemia virus is common in Japan and the Caribbean but has a relatively low incidence in the UK. It infects T-cells and can be transmitted in human organs, tissues which contain white cells. Infection carries a risk of developing T-cell lymphomas, myelopathy and other inflammatory conditions.

At its meeting last February, MSBT advised, on the basis of a risk assessment, that screening of all blood donors for HTLV should start throughout the UK as soon as practicable and screening of pooled samples has already started.

The risks associated with possible transmission of HTLV via organ and tissue transplants has not been formally assessed. However, it is clear that all organ transplants and most tissue transplants (except where processing includes a virus inactivating step) are capable of transmitting HTLV virus.

MSBT did not have the information necessary to decide whether:

- **it is practicable to test all stored tissues.** Some stored tissues will have undergone a virus inactivating procedure and should not need testing. The National Blood Service agreed to provide further advice on testing stored tissues.
- **all tissue donors should be tested, particularly ocular tissue donors.** The Department of Health, was asked to seek the advice of the Ocular Tissues Advisory Group (OTAG) of UK Transplant on the costs and benefits of screening ocular tissue donors.
- **organ donors should be tested.** The Department of Health was asked to seek the advice of the organ transplant advisory groups of UK Transplant on the advisability of screening organ donors for HTLV.


ACTION

The testing of all **new** tissue donors should be started as soon as practicable.

Any stored tissue which has not been tested should, if issued, be clearly labelled as **not** tested for HTLV.

Once MSBT has received advice on the outstanding questions above, the MSBT will issue further advice and the MSBT Guidance available on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk will be updated.

Yours sincerely



HENRIETTA CAMPBELL (Dr)