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Seeking Closure – Compensation for Contaminated Blood

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People affected by contaminated blood in the UK may not receive compensation any time soon. Dubbed the biggest treatment disaster in NHS history, around 30,000 people were exposed to HIV, hepatitis B, or C through contaminated blood products between the 70s and 90s.

Key takeaways:

- In the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of people with hemophilia became infected with bloodborne illnesses through contaminated blood products.
- The contaminated blood products were largely sourced from countries with lower safety standards than the UK.
- Around 30,000 people are estimated to have been infected with HIV and hepatitis C.
- It is thought that 1,820 of these people have died.
- Victims of this tragedy continue to fight for justice and proper compensation from the government, but despite promises of an interim payment, no date has been set.

Blood transfusions are a cornerstone of modern medicine, and blood products in the UK undergo a rigorous screening process to protect patients from potential contamination.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s, poor safety standards led many people with hemophilia and other bleeding disorders to be infected with bloodborne illnesses through contaminated clotting factors extracted from blood.

Factor VIII

The new treatment — a clotting agent called Factor VIII — was introduced to help their blood clot.

The idea was to improve lives. Before this revolutionary treatment, people required lengthy stays in the hospital and blood transfusions, even for minor injuries.

Unfortunately, the UK struggled to keep up with demand, so Factor VIII was largely sourced from the US and other countries that were not as rigorous about safety standards.

Much of the plasma used to make Factor VIII came from donors like prison inmates and drug users, who sold their blood, people at an increased risk of blood-borne viruses. At the time, far less was known about HIV and hepatitis.

The risk of contamination was increased further as Factor VIII was made by pooling plasma from up to 40,000 donors and concentrating it into a single batch. As a result, even if only one donor was infected, all the vials of Factor VIII could be contaminated.

Consequently, contaminated blood products entered the UK's health system and were given to thousands of people with hemophilia, many of whom later developed life-threatening illnesses such as HIV or hepatitis C.

A recent [study](#) calculated that 1,820 people died as a result of being infected with Factor VIII, but the true number could be as high as 3,320.

The struggle for justice

The victims of this tragedy are still struggling for justice. For decades they have been demanding recognition and adequate compensation for their losses.

As yet, the government has paid [no compensation](#) to the victims. However, it has provided various funds to pay people infected with HIV and hepatitis. In 2017, these funds were replaced by infected blood support schemes that provide financial and psychological support to victims and their family members.

In August 2022, the government announced that people registered on these schemes were eligible for an [interim compensation payment](#) of £100,000 after retired High Court Judge Sir Brian Langstaff argued there was a compelling case to make payments urgently.

Because many victims have died, and others have delicate health after developing hepatitis C and HIV, campaigners are pushing for a full compensation package to be announced as soon as possible.

However, earlier this month, Paymaster General Jeremy Quin — the minister who makes payments on behalf of departments — told MPs he could not set a timetable for these payments. Although Mr. Quin said there was a "moral case for the payment of compensation," it is not clear when, or indeed if, these payments will be made.

The victims of this tragedy continue to fight for justice, and authorities must take action soon. The longer it takes to put in place a proper compensation system, the more lives are at risk and the greater the injustice done to all those affected by tainted blood products in the UK.

Resources:

1. The Hemophilia Society. [The contaminated blood scandal.](#)
2. GOV.UK. [Infected Blood victims to receive £100,000 interim compensation payment.](#)
3. Infected Blood Inquiry.org. [Expert Report to the Infected Blood Inquiry: Statistics.](#)

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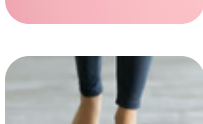
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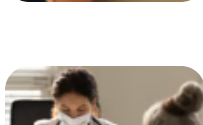
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