

## 60 patients get AIDS from infected blood

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**H**AEMOPHILIACS infected with the AIDS virus are preparing for what would be a massive compensation claim against the Government.

Their aim is to get financial help for the 60 patients, or their dependents, who received HIV through contaminated blood products in the 1980s.

In the UK, a similar claim resulted in 1991 in an out-of-court settlement of £75 million (HK\$1.02 billion) after a four-year fight.

The Hongkong Haemophilia Association (HHA), representing about half of the 150 local sufferers of the blood-clotting disorder, said it was likely to be a tough fight.

The Government told the *Sunday Standard* it had did not plan to provide compensation.

The HHA's chairman said the group was in the preliminary stages of preparing for a claim.

But already it has been guaranteed help from one formidable ally. The Haemophilia Society of the United Kingdom has pledged to provide the "knowledge, expertise and experience" to help speed any Hongkong legal action.

Haemophiliacs lack haemoglobin which controls blood-clotting, the most common deficiency is of Factor 8, and need regular injections of the agent, obtained from blood donors.

In the event of haemorrhaging they also need blood transfusions.

But only since August 1985 has all blood in Hongkong been tested for HIV before use.

In the same month the Government also made HIV-screened and heat-treated blood concentrate, including Factor 8, available for haemophiliacs.

Tragically, that was too late for the 60 haemophiliacs who had already received contaminated blood products. Nine have so far gone on to develop AIDS and five have died from the disease.

Three other people received HIV through contaminated blood given in the course of medical treatment not associated with haemophilia.

In the UK case, British haemophiliacs claimed the government should have acted more quickly in stopping imports of Factor 8 from the United States after the AIDS danger became known in the 1980s, and failed promptly to introduce proper screening of blood.

Even after the four-year legal battle and the £75 million settlement the British Government refused to admit liability.

