

AIDS

30,000 people in this country are probably infected with the Aids virus, though only 4,000 know they are. Not everybody infected with the virus develops the disease - at the moment we expect about 25% to contract clinical Aids. 550 people currently have clinical Aids.

10-20 people are being infected with the virus every day. There are three ways of getting infected:

- i. drug addicts sharing dirty needles;
- ii. sex (not just amongst homosexuals);
- iii. pregnant mothers passing it to their foetuses.

The costs of Aids will be enormous - about £20,000 per person with the disease. Cases of the disease are doubling every year and so are the costs. Next year they may be £30m.

Popular concern has increased dramatically over the past months. Public education measures which only a year ago might have been attacked for bad taste will be more acceptable now. There was not a single complaint about obscenity in the newspaper advertisements earlier this summer. The proposed new leaflet is hardly more explicit, though it will be go to every household. It may be backed by TV advertisements.

I recommend that you agree to the leaflet as a sensible public education measure. I also think it might be worthwhile having a short meeting with the Chief Medical Officer and the Minister for Health. This would enable them to brief you on what is probably the most important public health issue this century. You could also discuss how best to carry forward the campaign.

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