

BRITAIN

Mad-cow death follows transfusion

LONDON — (AP) — The British government on Wednesday announced the first reported case of a person dying from the human form of mad-cow disease after a blood transfusion from an infected donor.

Health Secretary John Reid told Parliament it was not possible to determine whether the transfusion recipient contracted the fatal brain-wasting illness from the donor or whether the two were independently infected. But it was the first report supporting the idea the disease might be transmitted through blood transfusions.

"This is a single incident so it is impossible to be sure which was the route of infection. However, the possibility of this being transfusion-related cannot be discounted," he said.

Dr. Philip Tierno, director of clinical microbiology and immunology at New York University Medical Center said experts have long suspected the disease, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, might be spread through blood transfusions.

Animal studies have indicated it's possible and have suggested that white blood cells could be a source of

infection, he said.

Britain already has instituted extra precautions for the blood supply in case that turns out to be true.

However, the transfusion reported Wednesday occurred in 1996, one year before the government started to apply such safeguards to the blood supply in Britain, where nearly all cases have developed.

All blood products for use in operations in Britain are now based on plasma imported from the United States, where there have been no cases of human mad cow disease blamed on American beef.

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