

# UK contaminated blood scandal: Schoolboy survivors say they were 'injected with death'

By Europe bureau chief [Samantha Hawley](#) in London

Posted Tuesday 28 Sep 2021 at 5:24am, updated Tuesday 28 Sep 2021 at 7:55am



Treloar's College was a boarding school for physically disabled children and gave students with haemophilia blood transfusions between 1974 and 1987. (*Wikimedia Commons: Sir William Purdie Trealor*)

Lord Mayor Treloar College was meant to be a haven for boys who could die from a broken arm or a tumble down the stairs.

Within the walls of their boarding school, they were protected from the sharp edges and steep falls of the outside world.

But in the 1980s, the greatest danger they faced was not just inside the school grounds.

It was injected straight into their veins.

Of the 89 boys who attended the school in the 1970s and 80s, three-quarters are now dead.

Treloar promised cutting-edge treatments for their severe haemophilia in between classes, swimming and archery lessons.



Treloar College says it's "truly saddened" that some students were given contaminated blood at the school in the 70s and 80s. (Wikimedia Commons: Graham Horn under [Creative Commons](#) license)

But it turned out they were actually being injected with blood collected from US prison inmates and intravenous drug users.

Imported human plasma was contaminated with HIV and hepatitis and unknowingly passed on to the children.

The result was a devastating loss of life. Only 17 of Treloar's 1980s graduates live today.

Survivor Gary Webster told an inquiry into the scandal he has "guilt for still being here".

"You cannot put children in beds and give them treatment and not tell them the dangers of that treatment," he said.

"No-one told us we were injected with death."

But the use of tainted blood was not limited to Treloar College.

In the UK alone, up to 30,000 people were treated with contaminated blood and as many as 3,000 lives have been lost.

Countless others have had their livelihoods destroyed as a result of the scandal that saw infected blood used to treat those with haemophilia or patients given transfusions after accidents and childbirth.

## Lives 'torn apart' by contaminated blood

Haemophilia, an inherited disorder that prevents blood from clotting properly, was initially controlled by transfusions of plasma products.

The widespread contamination is believed to have started after the UK began to import a blood-clotting agent known as Factor VIII from the US, as it struggled to keep up with demand at home.



John Grindley was diagnosed with HIV in 1984 after a contaminated blood transfusion. *(Supplied)*

John Grindley, a severe haemophiliac, relied on Factor VIII to stay alive.

When he was diagnosed with HIV in 1984, his wife Mary said their lives became a "living hell".

Not long after John received his result, Mary asked his specialist the most pressing question she had at that time: Could they try for a second child?

She was told to put "everything on hold".

"AIDS had just become big news," Mary recalled of the moment in 1984.

"There was no more thought of a second baby, no more marital relationship, there was no close contact with one another."

Many people wrongly believed in the 80s that HIV could be transmitted through casual touch.

"John had a separate cup and plate and towel," Mary said.

He died a decade later, aged 41.



John and Mary Grindley used different cups and towels until his death in 1994.

Lawyer Michael Imperato is representing the Grindleys and several other families at the inquiry into what has been called the biggest treatment disaster in the history of the UK's National Health Service.

It is also considered to be one of the country's worst peacetime disasters.

While the victims want compensation of some sort, their main aim, according to Mr Imperato, is to understand what happened and why their lives were "torn apart".

"The victim might have been a husband with young children and a wife," Mr Imperato said.

"Children are left without a mother and then you have other people who have not died but lived with terrible debilitating illness."

## **Was contaminated blood sourced from Australia?**

Thomas Dai Griffiths, who was born with haemophilia, assumes he contracted hepatitis C from blood from the US.

But he will never know as he was also receiving blood products prepared in laboratories in Western Australia.

Tens of thousands of people around the world were infected with contaminated blood from Australia between the 1970s and early 1990s, when screening procedures became more stringent.

In 1996, Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (CSL), which was owned by the federal government up until 1994, admitted it had previously mixed Australian blood with blood from other countries throughout the Pacific.



Dai Griffiths received blood from the US as well as blood products prepared in Western Australia. *(Supplied)*

"There can be no certainty on this because I received the Australian blood products right throughout the 70s and my hepatitis C was not recognised until nearly 1980," Mr Griffiths said.

"So, I cannot be certain where the hepatitis C infection originated."

Mr Griffiths has given evidence to the blood inquiry, alleging authorities at the time went to great lengths to cover up the mistakes being made.

"There seemed to be a coalition of secrecy between government, ministry of health and health departments regionally and indeed senior haematologists," he told the ABC.

"It was almost as if they were afraid of the information becoming public and that inevitably cost lives."

After decades of ill health, the now 76-year-old underwent a liver transplant in 2004.

"I have enjoyed 16 good years since then," he said.

## 'It was covered up for 30 years'

Britain's former health secretary Ken Clarke, who held the position in the early 1980s, was condemned by victims' families when he appeared dismissive of their concerns when fronting the inquiry in July.

At one point he questioned the need for "such meticulous detail".

But for Mr Imperato, the detail is where the devil lies.

In his view, two scandals are being investigated by the UK inquiry; one into why contaminated blood was distributed, and a second looking at what governments did or did not do.

"It was covered up for 30-odd years and it is the same in Australia," he said.



Mary Grindley says the stigma of her husband's HIV status ruined their lives. *(Supplied)*

Mary Grindley, now 72 and a widow, has been a strong advocate for the victims during the inquiry that will continue to hear evidence for the remainder of the year.

After years of social isolation because of her husband's HIV status, she had a mental health crisis after his death and lost her job as a teacher.

Asked if it had destroyed her life, she replied: "Oh yes completely and it has done ever since."

Posted 28 Sep 2021 28 Sep 2021, updated 28 Sep 2021

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