

## Fears raised over new vCJD wave

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**Doctors fear a new wave of the human form of "mad cow disease" is about to hit Britain, BBC Newsnight has learned.**

In the UK, 164 people have died of variant CJD, which originally came from cows infected with BSE, and all cases shared a version of a certain gene.

But Newsnight has been told of a new case in a separate genetic group.

The government's chief adviser on vCJD, Professor Chris Higgins, said estimates were that up to 350 people could become affected by this new type.

He told Newsnight the new case had been diagnosed on a clinical basis as vCJD.

Such cases can be officially confirmed only if further, more invasive, tests go ahead, such as a brain biopsy.

What is of concern to doctors in the new case is that the individual concerned has a particular genetic make-up and it is the first case to appear of that type.

There is a key gene linked to vCJD and 42% of the population have a version of that gene, known as MM.

The number of human victims peaked in the year 2000 and there are now only a handful of cases a year.

It looked like the disease had almost gone away, but this new case is from a group with a version of the gene called MV.

This raises fears that the 47% of the population who have this gene are now at risk.

Prof Higgins, chairman of the government's Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, said: "Given that 160 to 170 MM individuals were infected, we would estimate the number of MV victims would be a maximum of 300 to 350, probably between 50 and 350."

### **Silent carriers**

Hugh Pennington, the emeritus professor of bacteriology at Aberdeen University, told Newsnight that any new cases may well have originated at the same time as the original vCJD outbreak.

He said it was probably the case that the MV-gene cases "have a longer incubation period, because they're more resistant... a longer period goes by between [the patient] being infected... and falling ill."

The new case is likely to push the whole issue up the political agenda again.

Campaigner Christine Lord, who lost her son to vCJD a year ago, when he was 24, is going to Downing Street on Thursday to ask Gordon Brown to do more.

"I want people to know out there that vCJD hasn't gone away and it's still killing people... and now it looks like it's the next wave."

She said that while not much could be done about those who might already have been infected by eating BSE-infected meat, the chances of secondary infection via blood donors who might be "silent carriers" of the disease could be minimised.

She wants the government to speed up the use of tests that might screen people's blood supply for vCJD and

to release documents she says will name those who are to blame for the whole BSE fiasco.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/health/7788627.stm>

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