HIV scare for thousands of patients

Thousands of patients in Bristol and Bournemouth have been informed they could be infected with HIV or hepatitis because a dentist failed to sterilise his instruments properly.

He has been suspended pending an investigation by the General Dental Council.

In Bristol, 5,000 patients, who were treated at the two surgeries while the dentist was there, have been sent letters.

Director of public health at NHS South Gloucestershire, Dr Chris Payne, said that the risk is ‘very very low’ and added that there has never been a documented case in the UK of blood-borne viruses being passed from one patient to another in a dental practice.

In the letter to patients he said that infection ‘can only happen in the rare event that a small amount of infected blood from one person gets into the bloodstream of another patient and the risk of this happening in dental care is very low indeed.’

Health bosses have refused to name the dentist, who has now retired, or the other surgery in Bournemouth.

NHS South Gloucestershire, NHS Bristol and NHS Bournemouth and Poole have said the risk to patients was very low.

Patients are being asked if they wish to attend a specialist clinic where they can have blood tests for HIV and Hepatitis B and C.

The patients affected have been sent letters telling them about the potential risk of blood-borne infections after a dentist was found to have been following poor infection control measures.

The council advises all dental professionals to ‘put patients interests first and act to protect them.’

The dentist had been working as a family dentist in Glasgow in 2005 when he was exposed by a tabloid newspaper for posing on a gay sex website. He then moved to south London but failed to inform his bosses he had HIV.

GDC guidelines for dental professionals stipulate that anyone who believes their own health condition might put patients at risk is advised to ‘take action’. This includes seeking advice from colleagues, professional or defence organisations.

The council advises all dentists to ‘put patients interests first and act to protect them.’