

Warning of increase in AIDS after atomic war

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Any survivors of a nuclear war face starvation and the prospect of dying of AIDS, the British Medical Association says in a report published yesterday.

The BMA's board of science, in an investigation into the long-term effects of a nuclear war, says changes to the world's climate would result in the starvation of billions of people. In addition to starvation, there would be "increases in cancer rates, genetic diseases and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)."

It was likely that even a limited nuclear war, particularly in Europe, could result in a nuclear winter. Britain would not be spared, and the Government should initiate studies to determine the consequences more precisely.

The report says that survivors of a nuclear exchange could suffer from AIDS because of radiation-induced damage to their immunity system. "Animal studies have shown that radiation impairs the immune system, and there is much clinical evidence of immunosuppression by irradiation in humans.

"It appears likely, therefore, that the millions of people exposed to non-lethal irradiation during and after a nuclear exchange may become susceptible to diseases of immunodeficiency."

The report points to a recent study which spoke of a "striking similarity between those with AIDS and the anticipated immunosuppressed condition of survivors of a nuclear war." The study adds that a "marked increase in the incidence of AIDS-related diseases should be anticipated among such survivors."

The nuclear winter theory is that the smoke and dust thrown into the atmosphere by nuclear explosions would block off the sun's rays, causing temperatures to fall. The BMA report says: "The UK is vulnerable to the effects of a nuclear winter."

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