Bureaucracy leads.

to Aids scandal

By ELAINE GANLEY

PARIS, Thursday

France's deep pride in its role as

a leader in Aids research has been

shaken by revelations that highlevel

authorities deliberately delayed

acting to protect hemophiliaes, from contamination.

About 1,200 French hemophiliacs, nearly half the total, are HIV positive, and 185 have died of Aids.

A government-ordered report

released on September 10 provides

a chronological account of

how hemophiliacs receiving blood

transfusions were sometimes given

blood tainted with the HIV

virus, the precursor of Acquired

Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

At one Paris blood bank, an

Aids victim gave blood 20 times

between 1979 and 1984 according

to the report. '

The report suggests negligence

was a factor. Major lapses included

the failure to test blood donors

for Aids as soon as an American test became available in March

1985 and the failure to use a

known technique for neutralising

the HIV virus in blood stocks.

The report lays no specific

blame, but makes clear that top

medical and government officials

erred in their assessment of the

potential dangers and delayed

making decisions for financial

and nationalistic reasons.

It "bluntly reveals, for the first

time, the responsibility of the political powers", said the respected

newspaper *Le Monde.* "This drama

... 'has reached the dimensions

of' an affair of state." .

Following lengthy negotiations,

the government established a

fund in 1989 for hemophiliacs accidentally

contaminated. But the

'French Association of Hemophiliacs

says legislators should pass a

law providing for immediate indemnities,

in light of the new

revelations.

The group also said it would join in. legal action instituted three years ago by non-hemophiliacs

who contracted the Aids virus

during blood transfusions.

Suits have been filed for involuntary

homicide and poisoning, and

a criminal investigation is under

way. Only three hemophiliacs

previously had filed suit.

The report was prepared by the

inspector-general of social affairs,

Michel Lucas. It has been submitted

to Justice Minister Henri

Nallet and will be made available

to a magistrate investigating the

case.

The report shows how authorities

in 1985 disregarded near-certain

knowledge that blood was a

major carrier of the Aids virus.

They did not institute systematic

testing or the disease with an

American test available by March

1985. They also did not take measures

to "inactivate" the virus by

heating blood products - a technique

used in the United States

and West Germany by 1983 but

only available on a limited basis 'in France.

An internal note, dated June

26,1985, from the national centre

for blood transfusions advised

that distribution of non-heated

blood products would remain the

normal procedure as long as the

stock existed, according to the report,

which underlines the cost

factor in changing methods.

Heated products became obligatory

on October 1, 1985, while

systematic testing of blood donors

for the HIV virus went into

effect on August 1. (AP)

Ricky Ray, a hamophiliac who

was infected with Aids as a result

of a tainted blood treatment in

1986.