

JAPAN PLANS TO DENY VISAS TO ALIENS WITH AIDS VIRUS

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Body

The Japanese Government submitted legislation today that would deny visas to foreigners who are known to carry the virus that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome and are considered "likely to spread the virus to many people in Japan."

A Foreign Ministry official said Japan might also re-examine the visa status of foreigners already living here and found to be carriers of the AIDS virus.

However, the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, insisted that "we do not have any intention of screening all foreigners" entering or now living in the country. He also asserted that proposed changes in the immigration law would not necessarily bar all non-Japanese who have AIDS or carry the virus.

The official said the bill would affect only those carriers - including female prostitutes, male homosexuals and intravenous drug users - judged "likely" to spread the disease. How such a determination would be made was not clear.

Powers to Governors

The Government bill, which is likely to be approved intact by Parliament, also requires Japanese physicians to report AIDS cases and people who test positive for the virus to local health authorities, and gives prefectural governors power to order medical examinations for suspected virus carriers.

But the proposed law has few teeth, other than the considerable powers of persuasion enjoyed by Japanese authorities at all levels.

There are no specific penalties for violators except in cases when physicians, nurses or other hospital employees violate patient privacy by divulging confidential information to anyone other than the health authorities. In such instances, the bill would impose penalties of up to a year in prison and a fine equivalent to about \$2,000.

By American standards, the Japanese AIDS problem is small, but anxiety levels have been high in the last few months, prompting the Government to act quickly. Parliamentary approval, while almost certain, may be delayed, however, by a prolonged impasse over proposed new taxes that has paralyzed normal proceedings. #36 Cases in Japan According to the Health and Welfare Ministry, 36 cases have been diagnosed in Japan, and there have been 24 deaths. Almost all the victims were either Japanese homosexuals or else hemophiliacs who had received tainted blood imported from the United States.

In addition to known cases, experts say, as many as 10,000 Japanese may be carrying the virus.

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AIDS, an incurable disease that cripples the immune system, is caused by a **virus** spread through sexual intercourse or exchanges of blood. In the United States, where 33,000 cases have been diagnosed, most of the victims have been homosexual men or intravenous drug users, and the sexual partners of people in these two groups.

In explaining the law, Japanese officials appeared to be sensitive to possible charges that they had yielded to xenophobia by moving specifically against certain groups of foreigners and not against potential Japanese carriers returning from overseas.

On Records of Employment

Thus far, the known victims in this country include only one foreigner, a Swiss woman. Several Japanese men who have the disease are believed to have contracted the diseases while traveling abroad.

The Foreign Ministry official said that in applying the law to non-Japanese, immigration officers would try, when **AIDS** is suspected, to obtain a person's record of employment and sexual behavior from his or her home country. It was not clear whether such records existed in most countries or how they would be obtained.

There are no **plans** to exchange lists of known **AIDS** patients with other countries, he said, adding, "We cannot stop anyone from coming into **Japan** unless we have a convincing reason."

Among likely targets of the new policy are women from countries in Southeast Asia, especially the Philippines, who fall victim to Japanese gangsters and are brought to **Japan** to work as prostitutes in bars and brothels.

Even before the **AIDS** scare, the Japanese Government had begun a broad crackdown on Philippine and other Southeast Asian foreign workers, affecting not only prostitutes but others seeking lawful employment.

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