

# Canadians blame FDA in tainted blood case

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WASHINGTON — Already in court in Canada, hemophiliacs who are victims of AIDS and hepatitis are taking their campaign for compensation to the United States.

They say the U.S. government knew about infected blood plasma from state prison inmates yet failed to stop its export.

"If I had asked questions 15 years ago, lives could have been saved," said Michael Galster, a former medical worker at a now-defunct Arkansas company which collected plasma from a state prison in Grady, Ark.

The plasma was sold in Canada

and is suspected of having caused widespread disease among hemophiliacs who need the blood-clotting characteristics of the blood product.

The Food and Drug Administration decided the plasma was "not fit for the United States," said hemophiliac Michael McCarthy. "It's unbelievable that they allowed it to be exported."

McCarthy is the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit filed against the Canadian government for failing to safeguard that nation's blood supply.

At a news conference, the Canadians said they plan to sue the FDA and the states of Arkansas and Louisiana, which allowed private

companies to take blood plasma from prison inmates in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

They said they plan to question President Clinton in connection with the lawsuit about what he knew of the prison plasma program when he was Arkansas' governor.

According to a report prepared for the Canadian government, the Arkansas company, Health Management Associates, promptly told the FDA about blood samples that had been collected from five Arkansas inmates who had previously tested positive for hepatitis.

The FDA informed the Canadian government, because some of the

plasma from the company had been exported to Canada, and the company voluntarily kept off the market the plasma it still had.

FDA spokesman Lawrence Bachorik said the agency does not comment on pending or potential litigation.

The 1983 incident at the prison in Grady became an important part of the study prepared for the Canadian government on how hemophiliacs in Canada might have contracted hepatitis C.

Regarding Clinton, "there's no credible suggestion of any involvement by the president when he was governor," said White House spokesman Jim Kennedy.