Health officials say AIDS cases in Louisiana have tripled

Baton Rouge (AP) — Forty-nine new cases of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome have been reported in Louisiana since June, meaning the number of such cases in the state has tripled in that time, according to a state health official.

Dr. Louise McFarland of the state Department of Health and Human Resources, said the number of Louisiana victims has risen to 74. In the previous three years, there had been 25 cases of AIDS reported in the state.

In New Orleans, 48 cases have been reported since 1981; in Jefferson Parish, 8; East Baton Rouge Parish, 5; St. Bernard Parish, 1.

The remaining 12 cases are scattered throughout the state, McFarland said.

One of the reasons for the rise in reported cases is the increased awareness of the disease and its symptoms Groups at high risk from AIDS are chiefly homosexuals, Haitians who have come to this country since 1977 and those having sexual contacts with any of the risk groups, McFarland said.

In addition, transmission has been linked to the use of needles contaminated with AIDS blood, pregnant drug abusers and hemophiliacs at risk. There is no known cure for AIDS.

Dr. David Smith, medical director of the Blood Center of Southeast Louisiana, said doctors are alarmed by the increasing frequency of AIDS cases among the general population.

Earlier this month in San Francisco, a 66-year-old nun died of AIDS, which she apparently contracted from a blood transfusion. A controversial blood test to identify people who have been exposed to the AIDS virus should be licensed and available in about a month, officials said.

The test would allow blood banks to screen prospective blood donors, but there are some questions about the positive reading on the test that would be interpreted, and whether the results would be kept confidential.

Dr. Reuben Lutz, New Orleans Health Department director, said a positive reading in the test shows only that the person has been exposed to the virus believed to cause AIDS. And 20 percent of those with the illness test negative, Lutz said.