

WORLD

Another Russian vote for HIV test Proposal singles out foreigners

By Richard Balmforth
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MOSCOW — Russia's lower house of parliament yesterday gave the go-ahead for compulsory HIV tests for foreigners despite complaints from human rights groups and the Western community.

Deputies in the State Duma overwhelmingly approved the third reading of the law, which will affect foreigners in Russia "who visit Russia as tourists, students or for any other purpose."

But apparently aware of the alarm in Russia's foreign community, they have made clear it is up to the government to implement the controversial legislation as it sees fit.

Critics, including homosexual rights groups and members of the diplomatic community in Moscow, say the law is senseless from a medical point of view and discriminatory. Some say it is symptomatic of latent xenophobia in Russian society.

Deputies passed the third reading by 281-3 without discussion. It must still be passed by the upper house of parliament and signed into law by President Boris Yeltsin.

Under the legislation, foreigners would have to submit to a test for the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS, or show they had undergone one.

Foreigners refusing to be screened could be forced to leave the country. Anyone testing positive also would be subject to deportation.

The law also obliges Russian citizens working in certain jobs to be tested. Those shown to carry the AIDS virus might be barred from certain professions.

A European diplomat said he expected European Union members to make a joint protest to the Russian Foreign Ministry over the issue.

Even assuming the bill becomes law, it might well be unenforceable on logistical grounds. Russian laboratories, which lag far behind the West, would face a daunting prospect in trying to test the hundreds of thousands of foreigners living in the federation.