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Author repeats microbe warning

IF the warnings of a Cardiff scientist and author, given more than two years ago, had been heeded, the recent smallpox death in Middlesex might have been averted, he said today.

Mr. Brian Ford, who works in Cardiff, says that there is a need for control over the handling and storage of microbes in research, teaching and industrial laboratories.

It is possible the woman who died from smallpox at the weekend was infected by microbes used in a laboratory.

He warned over two years ago of the dangers, specifying smallpox outbreaks as one of the possible implications, and has campaigned for legislation.

Mr. Ford explained that microbes were being used increasingly in research and there were "obvious loopholes in the Public Health Acts" regarding them.

"There is a glaring anomaly when a person suffering from or carrying certain transmissible infectious organisms could be legally restrained as a health risk to others. Yet no regulations cover an individual who decides to carry a phial of the same virulent microbes in his pocket," said Mr. Ford.

He stressed that the majority of microbes were harmless but under certain circumstances they could become dangerous to health.