Blood transfusions & transplants and HIV

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If you are unsure, ask if the **blood transfusion** you are receiving has been **tested** for **HIV**.

FAST FACTS

- In most places in the world the risk of getting HIV from a blood transfusion is very low.
- International health guidelines state that all blood products must be tested for viruses such as HIV, and in most countries rigorous testing procedures are put in place.
- In rare cases where blood or blood products, such as a donated organ or tissue, have not been tested, HIV may be transmitted if the donation has come from an HIV-positive individual.
- You have the right to ask your healthcare professional if a blood product has been tested for HIV or not.
- You cannot get HIV from donating blood as new, sterile and disposable needles are used.

Can HIV be transmitted through blood transfusions?

Yes but this is very rare. In the unlikely event that a person who is HIV-positive donates blood products that are not tested, the person who receives the blood product is likely to develop an HIV infection too.

In order to prevent this, international health regulations require all blood products, such as organs or tissues, to be screened for a number of viral or bacterial contaminations before they are used.

If you're thinking about donating blood but are not

During the screening process any blood products which contain HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or syphilis will be disposed of.

This means that the transmission of HIV through blood products is very rare, but examples have occurred in some low-income countries which lack the equipment to test all blood.

sure about your HIV status, you can request an HIV test in advance of donating at your local clinic.

How do I know if the blood transfusion/transplant I'm receiving is safe?

In most cases, it's fine to assume the blood product you are receiving is safe. But if you are worried, it is your right to ask the healthcare professional whether it has been tested for HIV or not.

Blood donors are asked a set of standard questions just before donating blood to help determine if they are in good health or if they have been at risk of HIV infection in the past.

Some groups of people who are considered more statistically at risk of HIV infection are not eligible to donate blood products in some countries - either for set time periods or for life. These groups include:

- Men who have sex with men
- Sex workers
- People who inject drugs

If you fall into one of these groups of people, and you want to donate blood, talk to your healthcare professional who can advise you on whether it's safe and legal to donate blood or not.

Other activities may also require you to postpone your blood donation, such as having a tattoo or body piercing or if you are living with a certain health condition.

If you want to know more about donor eligibility, check the guidelines in your country as they are different all over the world.

Can I get HIV from donating blood?

There is no chance of getting HIV from donating blood. New, disposable and sterile needles will be used to collect your blood.

If you suspect that the needle your healthcare professional is using is not new or sterile then ask them to change the needle and check that it comes out of a sealed pack before agreeing to give blood.

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Sources:

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FDA (2015) 'Blood Donations from Men Who Have Sex with Other Men Questions and Answers'

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NHS Choices (2014) 'Blood donation (giving blood) – Who can donate'

WHO (2015) 'Who can give blood'