

# HIV VIRUS facts about HIV and AIDS Sex prevention needle

## FACT SHEET

### FACT

*It is impossible to become infected with HIV by giving blood. In the United States, new sterile equipment is used for each person who gives blood.*

### FACT

*In the United States, the risk of becoming infected with HIV from receiving blood is extremely low.*



**American  
Red Cross**

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## Giving and Receiving Blood

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### How is the nation's blood supply protected from HIV?

The Red Cross and other blood banks do several things to protect the blood supply from HIV. The Red Cross educates donors about who should not give blood and interviews everyone who wants to give blood. People who indicate possible risk behavior are not allowed to give blood. Donors can also stop their donation from being used. All blood is tested for signs of HIV, and all blood that shows signs of HIV is destroyed.

However, it is possible for people recently infected with HIV to give blood without knowing they are infected and before tests are able to detect signs of HIV in the donated blood.

### Is it safe to have a blood transfusion?

In the United States, the chance of becoming infected with HIV through transfusion is now extremely low.

Early in the epidemic, some people became infected with HIV from infected blood and plasma products before tests became available in 1985. Since then, testing methods have greatly improved; the risk of becoming infected with HIV from a blood transfusion is now estimated to be 1 in 1.5 million units of blood.

The risk of refusing a blood transfusion when one is needed can be far greater than the risk of becoming infected with HIV through a blood transfusion.

### What about having my own blood stored?

Your doctor may suggest that you consider having your own blood stored (autologous blood donation) in case you need a transfusion for a scheduled (nonemergency) surgery. Your doctor, local Red Cross blood center, or hospital can help you make your own blood available at the time of surgery.

## What about blood products used by people with hemophilia?

To control bleeding, people with hemophilia need clotting-factor concentrates made from the blood of many donors. Current clotting-factor production processes destroy HIV and other disease agents. The risk of HIV infection from receiving clotting factors is now extremely low.

## What do I need to know about HIV and AIDS?

AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. It is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). HIV primarily affects people by attacking the body's defenses (immune system). A person who has HIV may be susceptible to diseases most healthy people can resist.

People infected with HIV may look and feel healthy and may not even know that they are infected. Even though they don't look or feel sick, they can infect others. When symptoms do appear, they can be like those of many common illnesses and may include swollen glands, fever, and diarrhea. Only a blood test can tell if a person has HIV. Only a doctor can diagnose AIDS.

At this time HIV cannot be cured. However, there are treatments available that can extend life and dramatically improve the quality of life of many people living with HIV and AIDS. And, people can help prevent the spread of HIV by learning the facts and acting on them to protect themselves and others.

## What do I need to know about how HIV is spread?

HIV is spread by—

- ▶ Having oral, anal, or vaginal sex with someone who is infected with HIV.
- ▶ Sharing needles or syringes with someone who is infected with HIV.
- ▶ An infected mother to her baby during pregnancy or childbirth or through breast feeding.

Although some people have become infected by receiving infected blood or plasma (used for transfusion and to treat diseases like hemophilia), this is now very rare. Since 1985, all blood and plasma used in the United States is tested for signs of HIV. If a test shows the presence of HIV, it is destroyed. The risk of becoming

infected through a blood transfusion in the United States is extremely low.

All people share the responsibility to protect themselves and others from HIV infection.

## What if I think I may be infected with HIV?

If you think you may have been infected with HIV—

- ▶ You are encouraged to seek HIV testing and counseling.
- ▶ Do not donate blood, plasma, sperm, body tissue, or body organs.

Do not donate blood to find out your HIV status. The Red Cross tests blood to safeguard the blood supply, not to provide a testing service for people who want to know their HIV status. Because the test may not detect HIV infection in its early stages, people who think they may be infected could be putting other people at risk by donating blood.

Scientists emphasize that even people who respond well to combination therapy should be considered able to infect others through blood-to-blood or sexual contact, and should be encouraged to adopt and maintain prevention behavior.

## For more information, contact—

- ▶ Your local American Red Cross.
- ▶ The National AIDS Information Hotline (toll free): 1-800-342-AIDS. For Spanish-speaking persons, Línea Nacional de SIDA: 1-800-344-7432. For deaf and hearing-impaired persons, TTY/TDD Hotline: 1-800-AIDS-TTY.
- ▶ Your doctor or other health care provider.
- ▶ Your local or state health department.
- ▶ Your local AIDS service organization.
- ▶ The American Red Cross Internet website: <http://www.redcross.org/hss>.

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