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## **10 facts on blood transfusion**

Blood transfusion saves lives and improves health, but millions of patients requiring transfusion do not have timely access to safe blood. Many people die because safe blood is not available even in some urban health-care facilities.

More than 81 million units of blood are collected globally every year. Only 45% of these are donated in developing and transitional countries where more than 80% of the world's population lives.

Family or replacement donors and paid donors still remain a significant source of blood for transfusion in many countries. Adequate stocks of safe blood can only be assured by regular donation by voluntary unpaid blood donors, because the prevalence of bloodborne infections is lowest among these donors.

[Read more in the fact file](#)

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### **Related links**

World Blood Donor Day 2009

<http://www.who.int/worldblooddonorday/en/index.html>

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Blood transfusion safety

<http://www.who.int/entity/bloodsafety/en/index.html>

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## Fact 1

Blood transfusion saves lives and improves health, but millions of patients requiring transfusion do not have timely access to safe blood. Every country needs to ensure that blood supplies are sufficient and free from HIV, hepatitis viruses and other chronic infections that can be transmitted through unsafe transfusion.

## Fact 2



### NEW PHOTO

In developed countries, transfusion is most commonly used to support invasive medical procedures and surgeries like open-heart surgery and organ transplant. In developing nations it is used more often in pregnancy-related complications and severe childhood anaemia. As the demand for blood is increasing, blood shortages are common. More blood donors are needed to replace those

that are lost every year due to ill health, retirement and relocation.

Credit: **WHO**

Alt text: A small child receiving blood through transfusion

## Fact 3

In developing and transitional countries, many people die because safe blood is not available, even in some urban health-care facilities. In the southern African region, up to 20% of maternal deaths and 15% of child deaths are attributable to severe anaemia due to malaria. The management of these cases often requires safe and timely blood transfusion.

## Fact 4

More than 536 000 women die every year during pregnancy or childbirth, 99% of them in developing countries. Haemorrhage leading to blood loss is the main cause of maternal deaths worldwide, accounting for up to 44% of maternal deaths in some areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

## Fact 5

More than 5 million people die from violence and injury every year. Road traffic crashes are the leading cause of death among young people between 10 to 24 years according to the WHO report , *Youth and Road Safety*. Nearly 400 000 young people under the age of 25 are killed in road traffic crashes every year. Millions more are injured or disabled.. Safe blood transfusion is an essential part of emergency trauma care systems to minimize death and disability of injured patients.

## Fact 6

Donated blood should always be screened for HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and syphilis prior to transfusion, but in 31 countries (out of 133 countries reporting in 2006) not all donated blood is tested for one or more of these infections. Testing is not reliable in many countries because of staff shortages, poor quality test kits, irregular supplies, or lack of basic laboratory quality. It is also not affordable or cost-effective in most developing and transitional countries.

## Fact 7

More than 81 million units of blood are collected globally every year. Less 45% of these are donated in developing and transitional countries where more than 80% of the world's population lives. The average blood donation rate is three times higher in transitional countries and 11 times higher in developed countries than in developing countries.

## Fact 8

Adequate stocks of safe blood can only be assured through regular donation by voluntary unpaid blood donors, because the prevalence of bloodborne infections is lowest among these donors. It is higher among donors who give blood only as a replacement when it is required for a family and among those who give blood for money or other forms of payment.

## Fact 9



### NEW PHOTO

More and more countries are moving towards voluntary donation. Three new countries achieved 100% voluntary unpaid blood donation in 2006. But 38 countries were collecting less than 25% of their blood from voluntary unpaid blood donors. Family/replacement donors and paid donors still remain a significant source of blood in many countries.

Credit: WHO

Alt text: Poster for World Blood Donor Day 2008

## Fact 10

Often transfusions are prescribed when simpler, less expensive treatments might be equally effective. This exposes some patients to the needless risk of infections or severe transfusion reactions due to incompatibility of blood groups. Safe clinical transfusion practices are fundamental for transfusion to be truly life-saving with minimal risk.