

# Avoiding Diseases Transmitted by Blood and Body Fluids

Some diseases are primarily transmitted by contact with someone else's infected body fluids such as blood and semen. This includes the contact with body fluids that takes place during sexual intercourse.

By taking simple precautions that help you avoid contact with possibly infected body fluids of other people you can greatly reduce your chance of becoming infected with such diseases as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) [the virus that causes AIDS] infection,

hepatitis B, hepatitis C, gonorrhea, syphilis, and chlamydia infections.

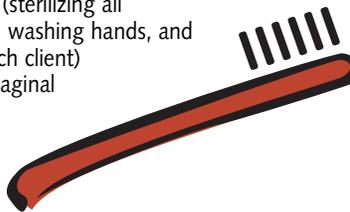
An article in the July 12, 2000, issue of *JAMA* reports on the rates of infections among blood donors that can be transmitted by blood transfusion for the years 1991 through 1996. Rates of infection involving the donated blood (infected blood is not used for transfusion) decreased or remained stable at low levels over time, suggesting that the behavioral risk screening program used to make blood donations safer is beneficial. **Blood**

**transfusion** refers to the placement of blood or blood components directly into the bloodstream. This is sometimes done to replace blood lost due to a surgical operation or from trauma such as blood loss from injuries caused by an automobile collision.

## LOWERING YOUR RISK OF INFECTION:

Avoid contact with other people's body fluids; if you do come in contact with body fluids, avoid getting any in your eyes, nose, mouth, near your genitals, near your anus, or on any broken skin such as open sores or wounds.

- Be certain that fully sterilized utensils are used for activities or practices where the skin may be punctured or bleeding may occur, such as getting a tattoo, having a body part pierced, acupuncture, or even manicures and pedicures; the person providing the service should follow proper infection control procedures (sterilizing all instruments, cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces, washing hands, and using a new pair of disposable latex gloves for each client)
- Practice safe sex: avoid contact with semen and vaginal fluids; correctly use a new latex condom for the duration of the sex practice every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, nail scissors, nail files, or any other personal care item that may have another person's blood on it
- Take extra precautions when traveling in a country with a high prevalence of blood-borne diseases; receive immunizations and medication from your doctor appropriate for the diseases that are prevalent in the country you are visiting
- Receive a vaccine for hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus if you think you are at risk of coming in contact with those viruses
- Do not reuse or share needles, syringes, water, or other times used to inject drugs; if you inject illegal drugs seek drug abuse treatment and get vaccinated against hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus



## DONATING BLOOD:

You *cannot* contract a blood-borne disease when donating blood in the United States. Many precautions are taken to make the procedure safe. For example, the needles used are sterile and are used only once and then destroyed.

## RECEIVING DONATED BLOOD:

To help ensure the health of those receiving blood, donated blood is screened for the presence of a number of disease-causing organisms, including those that cause hepatitis B, hepatitis C, syphilis, and HIV infection.

If you know in advance that you are going to have surgery, you may be able to donate blood to be stored in the weeks before your surgical operation. This blood would then be available to replace blood lost during your operation.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Infectious Diseases  
888/CDC-FACTS  
or [www.cdc.gov/ncidod](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod)
- American Association of Blood Banks  
301/907-6977 or [www.aabb.org](http://www.aabb.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at [www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm).

Additional Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Association of Blood Banks, The AMA Complete Guide to Women's Health, The AMA Family Medical Guide, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine

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