



Questions and Answers (Blood-to-Blood Transmission)

Q. How is HIV transmitted from blood-to-blood?

A. HIV lives within the blood of our body, the virus mainly affects certain cells within our blood called CD4 cells. CD4 cells are a part of our immune system, the system of our body that helps protect us from disease and illness. The virus weakens this protective system and people who are living with HIV/AIDS become less able to protect themselves from disease and sickness. When the virus is exposed to the cells of another person not living with HIV, they can become infected with the virus. One way this can occur is through blood-to-blood contact. Globally, five to ten percent of all HIV infections are attained through blood-to-blood contact.

Q. If most transmissions are sexual, who does this affect?

A. HIV transmission from blood-to-blood contact primarily affects three groups of people. First, intravenous drug users who are sharing or re-using needles for injections are at a great risk for HIV transmission. Although when exposed to open air the virus does not survive long, needles provide a protected environment for HIV. The direct passage of the virus from the needle into another person's blood stream provide a direct route for transmission, this type of transmission has a very high probability of passing infections. Hemophiliacs and recipients of blood transfusions are also groups of people who are statistically at an increased risk for HIV transmission however this is much lower because of greater precautions being taken in regards to blood screening.

Q. What about medical workers working with blood products of people living with HIV?

A. In response to the possibility of a medical worker being accidentally stuck with a needle that has been exposed to blood carrying the virus, a series of precautions have been created. One of these includes the use of anti-AIDS treatments after an accident to help reduce this possibility. Additional information can be attained at hospitals and clinics regarding this.

Q. What is being done about this transmission route?

A. As mentioned, blood products are now being screens in most hospitals and clinics before being given to people who need a transfusion of blood products. Drug users are advised not to share or re-use needles for injections, while other organizations support the implementation of needle exchanges and safe injection sites. If a new needle is not available, it is advised injection materials (including pipes, spoons, cotton balls, and syringes) are sterilized with bleach. Some nations have altered their laws in order to allow for prevention efforts to increase, such as decriminalizing the possession of syringes without a prescription.