



Donating blood saves lives!

Every year on **June 24th, World Blood Donor Day** is celebrated. This year's theme is *"20 years of celebrating donation: thank you, blood donors!"*. The 20th anniversary of World Blood Donor Day is an excellent occasion to thank blood donors around the world for their life-saving donations over the years, and to review the situation of transfusions and access to them around the world, considering the reality of countries and their populations.

Blood transfusions are important, helping to reduce infant and maternal mortality; drastically improving the life expectancy and quality of life of patients suffering from life-threatening hereditary diseases, such as hemophilia and thalassemia; and acquired diseases, such as cancer and traumatic hemorrhage; as well as supporting complex medical and surgical procedures, including transplants.

In high-income countries, transfusion is a commonly performed intervention in cardiovascular surgery, transplant surgery, major trauma and the treatment of solid malignant tumors and blood neoplasms. In low- and middle-income countries, it is more often used in cases of pregnancy complications and severe childhood anemia. Therefore, in countries where there is a shortage of blood, children and pregnant women are the most affected, as they need it the most.

The World Health Organization (WHO) figures show that **118.5 million blood donations are made worldwide every year**, 40% of which are made in high-income countries, home to 16% of the world's population. In low-income countries the number of donations is less than **5 per 1,000 inhabitants**, in middle- and lower-middle-income countries it is 16.4 and 6.6 respectively per 1,000 inhabitants, while in high-income countries it is 31.5 per 1,000 inhabitants. These figures reveal a significant difference in access to blood and blood derivatives, which means that many patients who need transfusions don't have access to it.

World Health Assembly Resolution WHA63.12 calls on Member States to establish, implement and support sustainable, efficiently managed and nationally coordinated blood and plasma programs, in accordance with the availability of resources, to achieve self-sufficiency. It is the responsibility of each government to ensure an adequate and equitable supply of plasma derivatives, such as immunoglobulins and clotting factors, which are necessary to prevent and treat various serious conditions that occur in all regions of the world.



To guarantee the blood supply, countries rely on three types of blood donors: (i) voluntary and unpaid; (ii) family members; and (iii) paid donors. Adequate and safe blood supplies are ensured by voluntary and non-remunerated donors, because in this group the prevalence of blood-borne infections is lower. Therefore, on World Donor Day, it is important to highlight the essential role of voluntary and non-remunerated blood donors who guarantee universal access to this product and its derivatives for all populations.

In each country, the provision of safe and adequate blood should be an integral part of the national healthcare policy, ensuring, as the WHO recommends, the safe and rational use of blood to reduce unnecessary and unsafe transfusions, thus improving patient outcomes and safety and minimizing the risk of adverse events, including errors, transfusion reactions and transmission of infections.

The risk of transmitting serious infections due to the use of unsafe blood and the chronic shortage of blood has made the world realize the importance of blood availability and safety. Therefore, blood management is crucial to optimize outcomes, ensure safety and appropriate transfusions. The WHO supports countries in setting up national transfusion systems to ensure rapid access to safe blood and blood derivatives in sufficient quantities, as well as establishing good blood transfusion practices to meet patients' needs.

The WHO therefore urges Member States **to adopt integrated strategies** that include: a) Establishment of a national blood system, with well-organized and coordinated transfusion services; b) Collection of blood, plasma and other blood products from donors in low-risk, regular, voluntary and unpaid populations; c) Screening of all donated blood for transfusion-transmissible infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis; d) Rational use of blood and blood products to reduce the number of unnecessary transfusions and minimize transfusion-related risks; and e) Gradual implementation of effective quality systems.

It is important to highlight the need to ensure that health professionals routinely diagnose and correct iron deficiency and anemia, consider alternatives to transfusion, use drugs and devices to reduce the need for blood, use blood appropriately clinically and effectively manage patients who need transfusion.

Life-saving blood and donors as a whole and individually provide a great service of solidarity to communities by donating blood. Saving lives should be everyone's mission and everyone's support. Let's all donate blood so that it is universally accessible.

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