

Basic facts about HIV/AIDS

What body fluids transmit HIV?

These body fluids have been proven to spread HIV:

- blood
- semen
- vaginal fluid
- breast milk
- other body fluids containing blood

These are additional body fluids that may transmit the virus that health care workers may come into contact with:

fluid surrounding the brain and the spinal cord

fluid surrounding bone joints

fluid surrounding an unborn baby

The modes of HIV transmission

HIV is transmitted mostly through semen and vaginal fluids during unprotected sex without the use of condoms. Globally, most cases of sexual transmission involve men and women, although, in some developed countries homosexual activity remains the primary mode.

Besides sexual intercourse, HIV can also be transmitted during drug injection by the sharing of needles contaminated with infected blood; by unsafe transfusion, of infected blood or blood products; and from an infected woman to her baby - before birth, during birth or just after delivery.

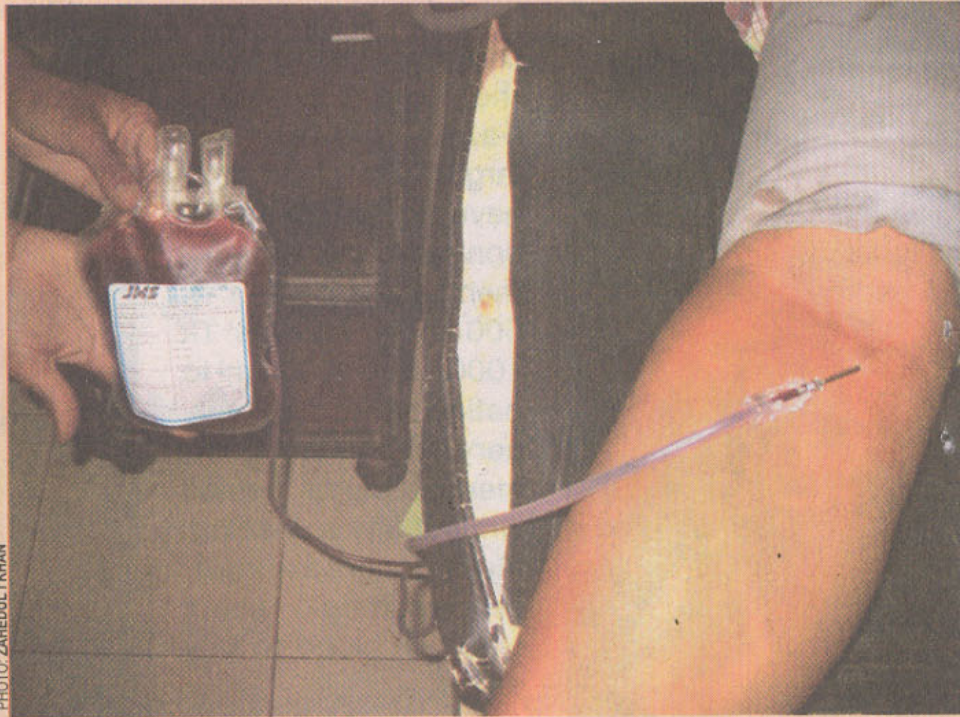


PHOTO: ZAHEDUL KHAN

With many blood banks being indifferent about proper screening of blood donations, the risk of blood infected with the AIDS virus is always a legitimate concern.

How to avoid the virus?

One can avoid HIV infection by abstaining from sex, by having a monogamous sexual relationship with an uninfected partner or by practicing safer sex. Safer sex involves the correct use of a condom during each sexual encounter and also includes non-penetrative sex.

INTERVIEW

Living With the AIDS virus

NAIMUL HAQ speaks to the executive director of Ashar Alo Habiba Akter about the existing problems of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)

"Treatment management for the people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) is a major concern now and unfortunately the state or private sector provides no support in this regard to any PLWHA," Says Habiba Akter, founder executive director of Ashar Alo, an organisation of PLWHA. "Many people are suffering from opportunistic infections who badly require care and support and most importantly hospitalisation but the public or private hospital do not want to treat us," continues Akter.

Akter, who has had wide range of exposure on travel-

ling to various countries to be trained on HIV/AIDS adds, "Nineteen out of a total of 108 members of our organisation died in the last two years. I am sure that if we were able to provide appropriate support to them they could have lived longer. Although we are getting support from organisations like Family Health International, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) and Action Aid it is still not enough. We need more support for example to buy anti-retroviral (ARV), to conduct regular testing for CD4 cells and viral load test, both of which are vital for a PLWHA but currently these are being done from our own organisation with great limitations."

"Last December one of our members in Sylhet had to