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## Cameroon Blood Banks Dwindling Amid Infected Donors

<p>Moki Edwin Kindzeka</p>

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Blood banks in Cameroon are facing a crisis because of the prevalence of HIV and hepatitis infections among blood donors. Up to 2010, the Central African subregion had a six percent prevalent rate of hepatitis and Cameroon alone had 16 percent, almost the same figures for HIV.

For the past three years, the general hospital in Yaounde has not been able to fill 40 percent of its 75,000 blood bags. The consequence is that many patients in the hospital are asked to bring their family members to donate blood.

Nelson Tawe has a sick relative who needed blood. He said a friend who was asked to donate was unable to help because his blood was tainted.

"It is very, very bad, it's a very, very bad experience. We were told that the blood was infected with hepatitis. Imagine that the blood had not been tested. My relative would have been infected with hepatitis. I do not know which of the hepatitis but it is God's mercy that keeps us on the safe side all the times," he said.

Dr. Biwole Sida, an official at the hospital, told VOA that many people in Cameroon are now afraid to donate blood because they must first be tested for hepatitis, which remains a major health problem in the country.

Dr. Sida said the prevalence rate in Cameroon for hepatitis B and C varies between 10 and 13 percent.

Ndasi Elvis, a popular doctor in Cameroon who owns a private clinic, said hepatitis has only added to a long list of reasons why blood supplies are dwindling.

"You see, if hepatitis B is already at 10 to 13 percent prevalence rate and HIV at 5.4, then you can imagine that this will considerably reduce blood that would have been given for transfusion," he said.

Dr. Elvis added that he knows many patients who have died in hospitals because there was no blood to give them.

"When you go to the hospital and you are severely anemic and there is no blood at the blood bank and there is no body to donate at that point in time, then you are left with nothing but death. If you go through, you look, you must have seen each one family or the other may have lost a relative because there was no blood," he said.

Local grassroots associations are being created in the country help contribute to the blood supply.

"We created this association to help hospitals and people in need of blood. Imagine that people die because they do not have blood. We contribute blood donated by our members and give the blood to those in need," said Cyril Ngaska, who leads one such association.

Some health care officials say the main reason why people do not donate blood is the fear of knowing their serological status and if they are infected with hepatitis. Cameroon's minister of public health, Andre Mama Fouda, has been piloting a campaign for people, especially the youth to accept being tested.

Fouda said he urges all young people who have not done so to get tested for HIV. He says if the results are positive, do not be discouraged. Follow the advice given by your doctors and you shall be taken care of. For those of you who are tested negative, maintain your serological status so as to create harmony when you get married.

As Cameroon's population has increased, so has the need for blood. The country's population today is about 22 million people. Also, the number of accidents have drastically increased with about a hundred reported each month. Last year, about 1,500 people died of road accidents in Cameroon, according to figures published by the country's Ministry of Transport.

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://aegis.org)