

References

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Prevalence of HIV Antibody in Paid Blood Donors

In March–April 1986, the Department of Health (DOH) carried out a study to determine the prevalence of antibody to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) among volunteer blood donors in the Taiwan Area¹. In this study, none of 15,000 donors tested were positive. While this information was reassuring, it did not obviate the need to obtain information about the prevalence of HIV antibody among paid blood donors who contribute approximately one-fifth of the nation's blood supply annually.

In September 1986, the DOH requested county and city health bureaus throughout the Taiwan Area to provide a name list of paid blood donors used by hospitals in their administrative areas. Each hospital was also asked to collect serum specimens from their paid donors for HIV antibody testing. Specimens were tested by the National Institute of Preventive Medicine (NIPM) using an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay. Specimens testing positive according to manufacturer's specifications (Wellcome) were retested. Repeat positive specimens were confirmed by Western blot.

During the period October–December, 1986, a total of 645 serum specimens were tested by NIPM. Slightly more than half of the specimens (55%) were from donors in Taipei City. None of the specimens in this study were found positive for HIV antibody.

Reported by the Bureau of Disease Control, and the National Institute of Preventive Medicine, Department of Health, Executive Yuan

Editorial note: The Department of Health estimates there are approximately 8,000 paid blood donors in the Taiwan Area, and they contribute approximately 15-20% of the nation's annual blood supply. The small number of paid donors included in our survey were those easiest for hospitals to locate and those willing to provide a specimen for testing. Therefore, this group is unlikely to represent the entire paid donor population. Paid donors most likely to be HIV antibody positive (e.g. male homosexuals, IV drug users, etc.) are probably those most likely to avoid being tested. Limited data on HIV antibody prevalence among paid blood donors are available from two other sources in Taiwan: the Taipei City Veterans' General Hospital (VGH), and the China Medical College (CMC) Hospital in Taichung City. The Taipei City VGH screened all of its paid blood donors for HIV antibody in 1986. During this period, a total of 1,855 paid donors were screened. Although four were repeatedly positive for EIA antibody to HIV, all were negative by Western blot confirmatory tests. The CMC Hospital tested a total of 195 paid donors over a several month period in 1986; none were positive for HIV antibody.

The results of all these studies added to those of the study of volunteer donors conducted last year provide some reassurance that the risk of contracting acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) from a blood transfusion in Taiwan is relatively low. For reasons already discussed, however, we still do not have sufficient information about paid blood donors to adequately assess the risk of AIDS in this group. It therefore seems prudent to recommend that hospitals avoid using paid blood donors whenever possible. Although only a few hospitals in the Taiwan Area are presently authorized to import HIV antibody test kits, it is likely others will be permitted to do so in the near future, and may want to consider screening their blood donor populations. The DOH is planning to repeat the survey of volunteer blood donors this summer, and will reassess the need for routine screening of all blood donors at that time.

References

1. Department of Health. Prevalence of HTLV-III antibody among volunteer blood donors in Taiwan. *Epidemiol Bull (R.O.C.)* 1986;2:51-2.

General Announcement

To strengthen the surveillance system and enrich the content of the Bulletin, we welcome accounts of interesting cases, outbreaks, environmental hazards, other public health problems of current interest or letters to editor. Articles (not more than 3,000 words), letters to editor (not more than 500 words) and requests to be placed on the mailing list should be sent to: the Editor, Epidemiology Bulletin, Bureau of Disease Control, Department of Health, The Executive Yuan, Republic of China, P.O. Box 91-103 Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C. TEL: (02) 396-2847.

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