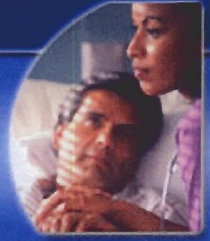




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## Botswana Project Encourages Young People To Donate 'Safe Blood,' Stay HIV-Free

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Botswana has launched a new project that encourages young people to donate "safe blood" and teaches them how to avoid contracting HIV, *Reuters AlertNet* reports. The project, Pledge 25, targets youths both in and out of school because "most of them are not yet sexually active, which means they are still free from HIV," Mukendi Kaembe, a National Blood Transfusion Service pathologist at the Princess Marina Hospital in the capital city of Gaborone, said. The project also focuses on young people because it promotes donating blood 25 times in a lifetime, Kaembe said. The U.S.-based [Safe Blood for Africa Foundation](#) helped the [Botswana Health Ministry](#) launch Pledge 25, which originated in Zimbabwe and has been copied in Haiti, India, Malawi and Uganda. According to the foundation, such projects have helped Botswana's supply of safe blood double since 2003 and the amount of HIV-infected blood donated has been cut by half because of improved screening of donors and counseling. Donor counseling and screening are essential because there is always a period of time after a person contracts HIV when the virus does not show up on tests but is still infectious. Safe Blood for Africa has launched a similar program in Nigeria called Club 25. The foundation has hired and trained blood collection experts, donor recruitment specialists and scientists to screen donors and test blood to make sure it is free of HIV, hepatitis, syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases. The foundation also teaches donors how to avoid contracting HIV (Mosenyi, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10/21).

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