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Nigeria opens blood screening center to fight AIDS



Thu May 12, 4:11 PM ET

ABUJA (Reuters) - President Olusegun Obasanjo opened Nigeria's first blood transfusion center Thursday to help stem the spread of the **AIDS** virus by preventing the use of contaminated blood in Africa's most populous nation.

Nigeria's blood transfusion system has been in disarray, leaving those requiring blood to turn to unregulated suppliers, and exposing them to the risk of infection.

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"We must ... move away from the current practice of relying on touts, blood sellers and other questionable sources," said Obasanjo who donated his blood at the ceremony in the Nigerian capital Abuja.

The National Blood Transfusion Center is one of seven blood screening centers planned for Nigeria by the government in collaboration with the U.S. charity Safe Blood For Africa Foundation.

The center will upgrade transfusion methods and increase the supply of "safe blood" to hospitals across the country.

The **World Health Organization** says AIDS-contaminated blood accounts for 10 percent of all infections in Africa, the world's poorest and most AIDS-prone continent.

"The opening of the center is a critical step in the fight against **HIV** /AIDS," Safe Blood International said in a statement.

Nigeria's health service is in a deplorable state due to neglect during 15 years of corrupt military rule, and efforts to stem the decline since Obasanjo was elected in 1999 have so far failed.

Many hospitals do not have blood screening and storage facilities and many patients die from contaminated blood transfusions.

About one in every 11 adults living with AIDS virus in the world is a Nigerian, one out of 13 new infections happen in the West African country, while one out of nine deaths from AIDS-related complications, is a Nigerian, health officials said. (Additional reporting by Tume Ahemba in Lagos)

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