

HIV screening, ignorance keeping blood donors away

By **PETER ORENGO**

The introduction of stringent screening has led to a decline in the number of people stepping forward to donate blood.

The screening was introduced in the 1980s, a few years after the HIV virus was discovered. In Kenya, Aids, which is caused by HIV, has killed up to 1.5m people since the first case was diagnosed.

This means that a substantial percentage of donated blood that tests positive for HIV goes to waste.

"Testing is essential but the first and most important line of defense is the collection of blood from the safest possible donors," said Timothy Odongo, an official of the National Blood Transfusion Services.

On June 14 every year, the world marks the World Blood Donor Day. It is a day to raise awareness of the importance of voluntary donation and encourage more people to become

regular blood donors.

It is designed to celebrate and thank those individuals who voluntarily donate their blood without any reward, except the knowledge that they have helped to save lives,

In times of emergencies and national disasters, clean, safe and accessible blood is absolutely essential, especially since Kenya continues to face many tragedies.

However, due to lack of proper understanding of how blood donation works, some people keep away due to fear. Others find it repugnant.

Some cultural beliefs, and even religions that teach against giving blood, discourage would-be donors.

During self-transfusion, a patient is first given water. This ensures that he or she mainly loses water, and not blood, during the surgical procedure. The blood is pumped back after the surgery.