Lapses in Blood Screening - Tamil Nadu Case

Why in news?

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A 23-year-old pregnant woman in Tamil Nadu tested positive for HIV after receiving a unit of blood at a government hospital blood bank.

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What is the mandate?

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- Testing all donated blood units for a number of transfusion-transmissible infections, including HIV, is mandatory in India.
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- The ELISA test is used in all blood banks to screen for HIV.
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- Notably, ELISA test has very high levels of sensitivity to diagnose samples positive for the virus.
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- Since 2004, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) Action Plan-specified guidelines are being followed.
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- All blood banks are required to obtain from donors a written consent on their wish to be informed about a positive test result.
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- In case of testing positive for HIV, blood banks are required to refer the donors to designated voluntary counselling and testing centres (VCTCs) for disclosure and counselling.
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- VCTCs are required to inform the blood bank of a donor’s status only when the confirmatory test done at the VCTC too is positive.
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- This is to stop the person from donating blood in the future.
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What happened in the recent case?

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- The donor’s HIV-positive status became known in 2016 when he donated blood at the same blood bank.
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- This particular donor had consented to be informed of a positive result.
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- It is said that the blood bank tried but failed to contact the donor in 2016 to inform him of his HIV positive status.
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- But recently he had found out elsewhere that he was HIV-positive, and dutifully contacted the hospital.
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- But his blood (recent donation) had already been transfused to the pregnant woman.
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- The donor passed away after consuming poison following the incident.
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What is to be done?

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- Blood banks in India have a success rate of less than 50% in contacting donors testing positive for transfusion-transmissible infections.
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- Only half of the consented donors are contactable and even fewer visit a VCTC.
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- So NACO should address the lapses in screening procedures and also find a viable alternative to contact them without compromising the donor’s identity.
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- The focus should also be on creating awareness among donors to visit a VCTC to confirm their HIV status when alerted by blood banks.
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Source: The Hindu

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