

Fact Sheet

Blood Transfusion



What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion is a way of giving a small amount of one person's blood to another person who needs it. The doctor will discuss the need for blood before it is given to your child. You will be asked for your informed consent to treatment, prior to your child being given a blood transfusion.

Why does my child need a blood transfusion?

Blood transfusions are often given to save the lives of people who have serious problems.

Your child might need blood if they:

- Have lost a lot of blood i.e. during major surgery which may cause large blood loss or after a bad accident
- Are not making enough blood i.e. some illnesses such as cancer or sickle cell anaemia affect the bodies ability to produce blood

Sometimes small babies that are born premature might need a blood transfusion to stay healthy while they grow.

What are Blood Components?

Blood has different parts and each part has a job to do. A blood component is a term used to describe one part of blood. They include:

- **Red Blood Cells** - carry oxygen around the body. They may be given when there is bleeding or anaemia (low numbers of red blood cells)
- **Platelets** - are cells that help to make a cut stop bleeding. They stick together and plug up the

cut blood vessel so that no more blood will flow out.

- **Plasma** - is used to help blood clot (become thick). It may be used with platelets to prevent or stop bleeding.
- **Albumin** - is a protein in the plasma and can be given to help increase the volume of your blood when blood has been lost.

Are blood transfusions safe?

Australia has one of the safest blood supplies in the world. All donated blood in Australia is tested very carefully by the Australian Red Cross Blood Service to detect for infection.

Each blood donation is tested for hepatitis C, hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS and other infections that may be transmitted from blood.

If any donated blood fails testing it is not used. This is done to make sure that the highest standards in safety are maintained.

When your doctor talks to you about consent he/she will talk to you about the rare complications and the importance of the blood for your child's condition.

Are there other Alternatives?

There are some alternatives to blood transfusion that may be used such as autologous donations or medications such as iron supplements which can help to make your blood cells grow without receiving a transfusion.

Each child has different needs and sometimes the risk of not having a blood transfusion may be greater than the risk of having one. It is important to speak to your child's doctor about any alternatives.

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What happens during a transfusion?

Before your child is given a transfusion they will need to have a blood test to find out their blood type and find the best suitable match of blood. It is important that your child's full name and date of birth are checked carefully when this is done.

Before the transfusion is given to your child, two nurses will carefully check that the details on the blood pack match the details on the order and your child's wristband.

The transfusion will be given through an IV (commonly referred to as a drip). One pack of blood (a unit) will be given over 1- 4 hours. During this time a nurse will monitor your child regularly.

Are there any side effects?

Your child should not feel any pain when the blood goes in. However some children may develop a fever or a rash. These are usually due to an allergic reaction and are easily treated with paracetamol or by slowing down the blood transfusion.

Severe reactions to transfusion are rare. All staff responsible for giving blood transfusions are specially trained to manage transfusion reactions.

What if I am still worried?

If you or your child is still worried about receiving a blood transfusion, speak to your child's doctor or nurse and they will be able to provide you with more specific information on blood transfusion.

Helpful Internet Sites

Australian Red Cross Blood Service at www.transfusion.com.au or www.donateblood.com.au

Remember

- Speak to your child's Doctor if you have any concerns.
- Australia has a safe blood supply as each donation is carefully tested.
- Severe reactions to Blood Transfusion are rare. However if they do happen, doctors and nurses are trained to recognise and respond to them immediately.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

This document was reviewed on 15th September 2009.

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