

# Will my baby need a blood transfusion?

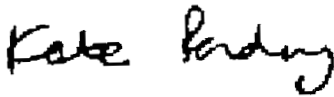
Patient information



Dear Parent,

Having a baby admitted to hospital is a difficult time for everyone in the family. To help, we have created this information leaflet. It explains what to expect if your baby needs to receive a blood transfusion as part of their treatment.

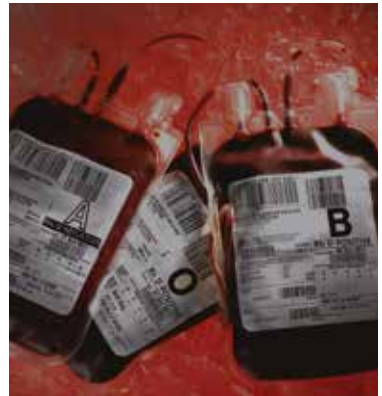
Kind regards,



**Kate Pendry**

Clinical Director, Patient Blood Management

**Like all medical treatments, a blood transfusion should only be given if it is essential. Your doctor or nurse will balance the risk of your baby having a blood transfusion against the risk of not having one. They will explain to you why your baby needs a blood transfusion, but please ask if they do not. They should also explain the risks and any possible alternatives before gaining consent for the procedure.**



## Why might my baby need a blood transfusion?


Newborn babies frequently become anaemic (have a reduced number of red blood cells), particularly if they are born early. This may be because of medical problems, or because babies who are unwell require a large number of blood tests to monitor their progress and this needs to be replaced. Occasionally, babies who are very jaundiced or anaemic need to have blood removed as well as transfused; this is called an exchange transfusion.

If your baby needs an operation, a blood transfusion may be needed to replace any blood lost during surgery.

## Risks associated with a blood transfusion

The risk that a blood transfusion will cause severe harm or even death is very low but this should be discussed with the doctor or nurse caring for your baby. One of the most important checks for a safe transfusion is to make sure your baby gets the right blood. To ensure this happens, staff carry out careful identification checks of both your baby and the blood they will be given. This is why it is important that your baby wears an identification band. If you are with your baby, you may also be asked to confirm your baby's full name and date of birth. Please remind the nurse or doctor to ask you this if they do not do so.

If you decide to change your baby's name for any reason, it is important to tell your doctor or nurse, so that your baby's records can be updated.



Compared to other everyday risks, the likelihood of getting an infection from a blood transfusion is very low. All blood donors are unpaid volunteers and the risk of an infected unit entering the UK blood supply continues to decrease<sup>1</sup>. Donors and blood donations are screened for a number of infections which can be transmitted through blood, but it is not practical or even possible to screen all donations for all infections, therefore, there will always be a small risk associated with having a blood transfusion.

The risk of getting variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) from a blood transfusion is extremely low. Each year, approximately 2.6 million blood components are transfused in the United Kingdom and there have been just a handful of cases where patients are known to have become infected with vCJD from a blood transfusion. More information on vCJD can be found on the NHS Choices website: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/Creutzfeldt-Jakob-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Creutzfeldt-Jakob-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx)

Further information on the risks of transfusion can be found at: [www.shotuk.org/home/](http://www.shotuk.org/home/)

## **Will a blood transfusion affect blood spot screening?**

A blood transfusion may affect the blood spot screening test, which is offered when your baby is between five and eight days old. If the blood spot sample has not yet been taken, your baby will need it done before they receive a transfusion. In addition,



they may require a further sample to be taken following a blood transfusion. More detailed information on blood spot screening is available here: [www.newbornbloodspot.screening.nhs.uk/public](http://www.newbornbloodspot.screening.nhs.uk/public)

## How is blood given?


A blood transfusion is given through a tiny tube directly into a vein. The blood will usually be given from a small bag or by a syringe. The amount of time each transfusion takes will depend on a variety of factors; your baby's doctor or nurse will be able to tell you more about this. If your baby needs to be given more than one transfusion, it is normally arranged for the blood to come from the same donor.

## How will my baby feel during their blood transfusion?

Most babies will not feel anything unusual during their blood transfusion. Your baby will be closely observed before, during and after the blood transfusion; but please inform staff if you have any concerns about your baby during or after the transfusion. Severe reactions to blood are extremely rare. If they do occur, staff are trained to recognise and treat them.

## Can I donate my blood for my child?

No. This is a common question but there are good reasons why this is not done. There is an increased risk of some types of serious reactions following blood transfusion from relatives. Unless blood from a close relative is specially treated with X-rays there is a risk that the transfused blood can trick the baby's immune system and bone marrow, resulting in bone marrow failure. It is better to avoid this risk.



## What if I have other worries about blood transfusion?

If you are worried or have any questions, please talk to your baby's doctor or nurse. Many hospitals have a dedicated Hospital Transfusion Team and they may be able to come and discuss your concerns with you.

## Become a blood donor

Nationally we use thousands of units of blood per year in the treatment of children. If you would like to help others by becoming a blood donor, please call **0300 123 23 23** or visit our website [www.blood.co.uk](http://www.blood.co.uk)

## Additional Information

As a precautionary measure to reduce the risk of transmitting vCJD, people who have received a transfusion of blood or any blood component since 1980 are not currently allowed to donate blood or blood components.

If you are interested in finding out more about blood transfusion and have access to the internet, you may find the following websites useful:

### **NHS Choices:**

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/blood-transfusion/pages/introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/blood-transfusion/pages/introduction.aspx)

### **NHS Blood and Transplant:**

[www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/what-we-do/blood-transfusion/](http://www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/what-we-do/blood-transfusion/)

## Reference

1. Public Health England (2014) Bloodborne infections in blood, tissue and organ donors (BIBD): guidance, data and analysis.

See: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/bloodborne-infections-in-blood-and-tissue-donors-bibd-guidance-data-and-analysis](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bloodborne-infections-in-blood-and-tissue-donors-bibd-guidance-data-and-analysis)

We would welcome your feedback and comments on this leaflet.  
You can contact us in the following ways:

**By post to:**

Customer Services  
NHS Blood and Transplant  
Part Academic Block – Level 2  
John Radcliffe Hospital  
Headley Way  
Headington  
Oxford  
OX3 9BQ

**By email to:** [nhsbt.customerservice@nhsbt.nhs.uk](mailto:nhsbt.customerservice@nhsbt.nhs.uk)

**Or by phone:** 01865 381010

This leaflet was prepared by NHS Blood and Transplant in collaboration with the National Blood Transfusion Committee. Further supplies can be obtained by accessing <https://hospital.nhsbtleaflets.co.uk>

Individual copies of this leaflet can be obtained by calling **01865 381010**.

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) is a Special Health Authority within the NHS and provides the blood that patients receive. In order to plan for future blood demands, information about which patients receive blood needs to be gathered. We may ask a hospital or GP to provide limited medical information on a sample of patients who have received blood transfusions.

Any information that is passed on to NHSBT is held securely and the rights of these patients are protected under the Data Protection Act (1998).

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## **NHS Blood and Transplant**

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) saves and improves lives by providing a safe and reliable supply of blood components, organs, stem cells, tissues and related services to the NHS and other UK health services.

We manage the UK-wide voluntary donation system for blood, tissues, organs and stem cells, and turn these donations into products that can be used safely to save lives or radically improve the quality of people's lives.

We rely on thousands of members of the public who voluntarily donate their blood, organs, tissues and stem cells. Their generosity means each year we're able to supply around 2 million units of blood to hospitals in England and 7,500 organ and tissue donations within the UK, which save or improve thousands more people's lives.

### **For more information**

**Visit** [nhsbt.nhs.uk](https://nhsbt.nhs.uk)

**Email** [enquiries@nhsbt.nhs.uk](mailto:enquiries@nhsbt.nhs.uk)

**Call** **0300 123 23 23**