

# Will my baby need a blood transfusion?

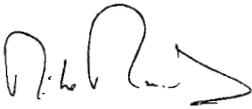
Patient information



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,



**Mike Murphy**

Clinical Director, Patients



**Rebecca Gerrard**

National Lead: Patient  
Blood Management Team

**Like all medical treatments, a blood transfusion should only be given if it is essential. Your doctor will balance the risk of your baby having a blood transfusion against the risk of not having one. Your doctor or nurse should explain to you why your baby needs a blood transfusion, but please ask if they do not.**



## Why might your 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.

## Are transfusions safe?

Yes, the risk that a blood transfusion will make your baby ill is very low. One of the most important ways of achieving 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 he/she 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. Blood donors are very carefully selected, and the donated blood is tested to make sure that it is suitable for transfusion.



The risk of getting hepatitis from a blood transfusion in the UK is about 1 in 1.3 million for hepatitis B and 1 in 28 million for hepatitis C. The chance of getting HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection is about 1 in 6.5 million or HTLV (Human T-Lymphotropic Virus) infection is about 1 in 18 million (figures published January 2011).

Although the risk of getting variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) from a blood transfusion is probably low with a single blood transfusion, the risk of any infection will increase with additional blood transfusions. Each year, approximately 2.5 million units of blood 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.

## **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 72 hours following the 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 any different during their blood transfusion, but reactions to a transfusion can sometimes occur. 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?

Please tell your baby's doctor or nurse about any concerns you have, no matter how trivial you think they may be. 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 currently unable 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 – Blood Website**

<http://www.blood.co.uk/about-blood/information-for-patients/>

### **UK Transfusion Services**

[www.transfusionguidelines.org.uk/index.aspx](http://www.transfusionguidelines.org.uk/index.aspx)

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 381042

This leaflet was prepared by NHS Blood and Transplant in collaboration with the National Blood Transfusion Committee. Healthcare professionals can obtain further supplies by accessing [ww3.access-24.co.uk](http://ww3.access-24.co.uk) and entering their Regional Transfusion Committee code.

If you do not have a code please call **01865 381042**.

The public can get copies of this leaflet by calling **01865 381042**.

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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.

### **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**