

Patient & Family Guide

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Blood Transfusion

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Blood Transfusion

You have been given this pamphlet because you or your loved one may need a blood transfusion. The health care team will explain the benefits and risks of a transfusion and what is involved.

A blood transfusion will only be given if needed. A member of your health care team will explain whether you (or your loved one) may need a blood transfusion and why.

What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion is a procedure where blood is given through an intravenous (IV) injection into a vein in your arm. A blood transfusion may also be injected into a muscle or under the skin using a needle. A blood transfusion may include:

- › Blood components (see page 2)
- › Blood products (see page 3)

Why would my loved one or I need a transfusion?

Blood is made of different parts that do different jobs to keep you healthy. The part that you (or your loved one) may need will depend on your problem or illness. You may need:

- › A blood component
- › A blood product
- › A combination of the 2

What are blood components?

Blood components are parts of whole blood. They can help with giving oxygen to organs, bringing your blood pressure back to normal, or helping to prevent or control bleeding.

If your health care team thinks you (or your loved one) may need a blood component, they will:

- › tell you which component(s) you (or your loved one) may need.
- › describe what the component does.
- › explain the risks and benefits, and how it is given.

What are blood products?

Blood products are made from human plasma (the clear, yellow, fluid part of the blood that carries the blood cells) or created in a lab. There are many kinds of blood products that affect your body in different ways. Your health care team will:

- › tell you which product(s) you (or your loved one) may need.
- › describe what the product does.
- › explain the risks and benefits, and how it is given.

Where does the blood come from?

Blood is collected from healthy volunteer donors at Canadian Blood Services (CBS). **CBS tests all blood for diseases** including:

- › Syphilis
- › Hepatitis B
- › Hepatitis C
- › HIV
- › Human T-Cell lymphotropic virus
- › West Nile Virus

This is to make sure that the blood is safe for transfusion.

Informed consent

Your health care team will talk with you about why you (or your loved one) need a transfusion. If you agree to the transfusion, you will be asked to sign a consent form. **You have the right to refuse a blood transfusion.** If you refuse, you will be asked to sign a *Refusal or Limited Consent for Transfusion of Blood Components and/or Blood Products* form.

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your health care team before signing the consent form.

Benefits

Blood is important. Not having enough blood, or enough of a blood component, can be life-threatening. Blood helps your body in these ways:

- › Red blood cells carry oxygen through your body to your heart and brain. Your body needs oxygen to stay alive.
- › Platelets help to prevent or control bleeding when your platelet count is low.
- › Plasma and blood products help to prevent or control bleeding after an accident or surgery, or if you have other health conditions.

Risks

Like all medical procedures, transfusions have some risks.

- › You may have a reaction. This can happen during or after the transfusion. Tell a member of your health care team right away if you (or your loved one) feel anything unusual (see page 7 for what to watch for).
- › You may have an allergic reaction or get a fever (temperature above 38⁰ C/100.4⁰ F).
- › There is a **very small chance** of getting a virus or an infection, or of being given the wrong blood component or product. There are many times when the need for a transfusion is much greater than the possible risks.

Are there other options?

Ask a member of your health care team if there are other options available to you instead of a blood transfusion.

What will happen during the transfusion?

- A nurse will check your blood pressure, pulse, and temperature before, during, and after the transfusion. They will also ask how you (or your loved one) are feeling.
- Most transfusions are given through an IV.
- Two members of your health care team will check the blood component or product in front of you. This is to make sure it is the right blood. There are a few exceptions to this. For example, when the product WinRHO® is being used, one member of the health care team and you (or your loved one) or your substitute decision maker may check the product together.
- Depending on what component or product is needed, the transfusion may take anywhere from a few minutes up to 4 hours.

What will happen after the transfusion?

- Reactions are rare and usually mild, but they can happen after any transfusion, even if you have never had a reaction before.
- **Tell a member of your health care team right away if you have any of these symptoms:**
 - › Rash, hives, itching
 - › Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) or vomiting (throwing up)
 - › More coughing
 - › Headache, dizziness
 - › Sensitive to bright light
 - › Fever or chills
 - › Cold, clammy skin
 - › Feeling unusually or very tired
 - › Back or chest pain
 - › Trouble breathing, wheezing
 - › Blood in your urine (pee)
 - › The white parts of your eyes turn yellow.
In very bad cases, people with lighter skin tones may see their skin turn yellow.
- **If you do not feel well once you get home, call 811 to talk with a registered nurse 24/7.**

Go to the nearest Emergency Department (ED) right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- › Severe (very bad) nausea and/or vomiting
- › Severe back, chest, or head pain
- › Trouble breathing
- › Blood in your urine (pee)
- **Do not drive yourself.**
- **Tell the ED staff that you have recently had a blood transfusion.**

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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