



Patient & Family Guide
2025

Antibodies and Surgery

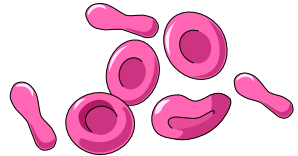


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Antibodies and Surgery

What are antibodies?

- Antibodies are proteins in your blood that protect you from disease. They are made by your body's immune system.



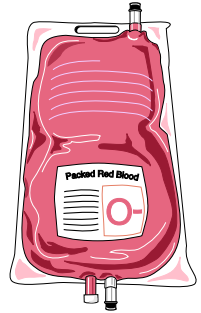
- When something that does not belong in your body gets in (like germs or a virus), your immune system signals specific cells to make antibodies.
- These antibodies attach to the germs or virus, and help stop them from hurting you.
- Some of these antibodies may stay in your blood for the rest of your life. Antibodies do not cause any health problems.

Why does my immune system make antibodies?

- Your immune system may make antibodies because you:
 - › Came into contact with germs or a virus
 - › Had a blood transfusion
 - › Have a disease that makes your body attack itself (like lupus, arthritis, or Crohn's disease)
 - › Are pregnant

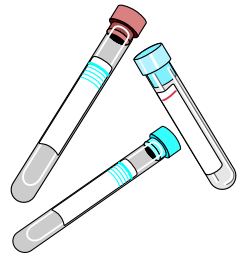
How do you test for antibodies?

- We will take a blood sample and send it to a lab. The lab will check if you have antibodies and find out what type they are.
- If you have antibodies, the blood transfusion service will set aside matching blood before your surgery in case you need a transfusion.
- Depending on the types of antibodies you have, your surgery may be delayed until we find matching blood.



I have antibodies. What does this mean?

- If you have antibodies, we will mail an antibody card to your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) after your surgery. If you do not have a primary health care provider, we will mail the card to your specialist.
- When you get your antibody card, keep it in your wallet.
 - › If you need a blood transfusion, show your antibody card to your health care team.
 - › If you need surgery, tell your surgeon's office that you have antibodies. Bring your antibody card to your Pre-admission Clinic appointment.



- If you have antibodies, you will need to have a blood sample taken before surgery. This blood sample is good for 42 days. If more tests are needed, you may need to have another blood sample taken. These tests help us make sure that we have matching blood ready in case you need a transfusion during surgery.

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.

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<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

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Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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