

Children receiving a blood transfusion

A PARENTS' GUIDE

Dear Parent,

Having a child in hospital is a difficult time for everyone in the family. To try to help in a small way, we have created these information booklets. They aim to explain to both you and your child what to expect if your child needs to receive blood or blood components during their treatment.

This cover booklet 'Children receiving a blood transfusion – A parents' guide', is for you and tells you in detail what is involved in receiving a blood transfusion.

There are also two smaller booklets. 'Amazing You – Let's Learn About Blood' has been specifically designed with younger children in mind. It features our mascot, Billy Blood Drop. In the booklet Billy explains, in simple story format, all about the importance of blood in the body and what your child can expect when receiving a blood transfusion.

The second booklet 'Voyages on the Microsub Discovery' has been designed for older children. Again it explains the vital role that blood plays in all of our bodies and what happens when you receive a blood transfusion. This booklet contains more facts and information and is designed for children to read and learn by themselves if they wish to.

Please look at the content of each booklet and feel free to decide, if at all, which booklet may help your child.

Kind regards



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Like all medical treatments, a blood transfusion should only be given when really necessary. The decision to give a blood transfusion to your child is made only after careful consideration. In making that decision, your child's doctor will balance the risk of your child having a blood transfusion against the risk of not having one. Ask your child's doctor to explain why your child needs a transfusion as there may be alternative treatments available.

Why might your child need a blood transfusion?

Most children cope well with losing a moderate amount of blood. The lost fluid can be replaced with a salt solution. Over the next few weeks the body makes new red blood cells to replace those lost. Medicines such as iron can help compensate for blood loss. However, if larger amounts are lost, a blood transfusion is the best way of replacing the blood rapidly.

- Blood transfusions are given to replace blood lost in surgery, and after accidents.
- Blood transfusions are used to treat anaemia (lack of red blood cells).
- Some medical treatments or operations cannot be safely carried out without using blood.

What can be done to reduce my child's need for blood before an operation?

- Encourage your child to eat a well-balanced diet in the weeks before their operation.
- Your child may need to have their iron levels boosted - ask your child's doctor for advice, especially if you know that your child has suffered from low iron levels in the past.





- If your child is on warfarin or aspirin, stopping these drugs may reduce the amount of bleeding. Please ask your child's doctor if they should stop these before their operation. (Please remember, for your child's safety, only their doctor can make this decision.)
- Sometimes it is possible to collect blood that is lost during or after an operation and return it back to your child. You may want to ask if this method is possible in your child's case.

Can I donate my blood to my child?

We are sometimes asked this question but there are reasons why this is strongly discouraged. Firstly, there is no benefit in reducing the risk of infection, as the risk with blood from unrelated donors provided by the National Health Service is already extremely low. Secondly, there are increased risks of a number of types of transfusion reactions with blood from relatives, and it is better to avoid these.

Are there any risks from receiving a blood transfusion?

The biggest risk from receiving a blood transfusion is being given the wrong blood.

Your child must be correctly identified to make sure that he/she gets the right blood transfusion. Wearing an identification band with the correct details is essential. You or your child will be asked to state their full name and date of birth, and the details on their identification band will be checked before each bag of blood is given. You can help by making sure this process happens correctly.

If your child has previously been given a card which states that they need to have blood of a specific type, please show it as soon as possible to your doctor or nurse and ask them to tell the hospital transfusion laboratory.

Compared to other everyday risks the likelihood of getting an infection from a blood transfusion is very low. All blood donors are unpaid volunteers. They are

very carefully selected and tested to make sure that the blood they donate is as safe as possible.

The risk of getting hepatitis from a blood transfusion is currently about 1 in 500,000 for hepatitis B and 1 in 30 million for hepatitis C. The chance of getting HIV or HTLV infection is about 1 in 5 million. Although the risk of getting variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) from a blood transfusion is probably low with a single blood transfusion episode, the risk of any infection will increase with repeated episodes of blood transfusion. Each year, approximately 2 million units of blood are transfused in England and there have been just a handful of cases where patients are known to have become infected with vCJD from a blood transfusion.

How is blood given?

- It is dripped into a vein, usually in your child's arm or hand, using a soft plastic tube.
- One bag of blood (a unit) takes about 2 hours to give (but can be given more quickly if needed).



How will my child feel during their blood transfusion?

Most children feel no different at all during their transfusion. However, some develop a slight fever, chills or a rash. These are usually due to a mild reaction or allergy and are easily treated with medication or by giving the blood more slowly.

Your child will be carefully monitored during their transfusion.

Fortunately, severe reactions to blood are extremely rare. If they do occur, staff are trained to recognise and treat these. If your child feels unwell during or shortly after their blood transfusion, please call the nurse immediately.

What if my child and I have other worries about blood transfusion?

Your child may be afraid of needles, worried about being squeamish at the sight of blood or have had a bad experience related to a previous blood transfusion. Please tell your doctor or nurse about any concerns you or your child may have, no matter how trivial you think they may be.

Other Information

If you are interested in finding out more about blood transfusions and have access to the Internet, you might find the following web site useful: www.blood.co.uk

Become a blood donor

Nationally we use about 20,800 units of blood per year in the treatment of children.

If you would like to help others by becoming a blood donor, please call 0845 7 711 711 or visit our web site www.blood.co.uk



The National Blood Service (NBS) is part of NHS Blood and Transplant, 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 Trust or GP to provide limited medical information on a sample of patients who have received blood transfusions.

Any information that is passed on to the NBS is held securely, with the rights of these individuals protected under the Data Protection Act.

Additional copies of this leaflet can be obtained from the NBS Hospital Liaison Administration Office on **01865 440042**.

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