

# Provincial Laboratory Services

## Blood and Blood Product Transfusion: *A patient guide*

# Health PEI

Laboratory Medicine

### Am I getting the right blood?

Although, we have a very safe blood supply in Canada mistakes can happen when getting blood. The most serious mistakes result from identifying the wrong patient. It is very important to make sure that your identification is checked before you have any blood tests or get your transfusion. Make sure you have your armband on and it is checked by the person who is drawing the blood and again when giving you the transfusion.

### What are the risks of transfusion?

As a result of the careful screening of donor blood, the risk of getting an infectious disease from a transfusion is extremely low.

There is a risk of having an adverse transfusion reaction. The more common of these reactions include mild fever or hives, while the more serious and less common may lead to difficulty breathing. Ask your doctor to explain the risks in more detail to you. Any questions you have should be answered before you get the blood transfusion.

### Signs and symptoms of an adverse transfusion reaction:

Because blood comes from another person there can be reactions during your transfusion so you will be monitored while getting blood. These signs may mean you are having a reaction to the blood transfusion.

- Headache, fever, chills, shaking.
- Feeling flushed or hot.
- Hives, itchiness, pain.
- Upset stomach or throwing up.
- You may have trouble catching your breath.

Many reactions happen within the first 15 minutes of the transfusion; **therefore it is very important to let your nurse know if you are feeling any different from usual, or begin to feel unwell.** If you had a transfusion outside of the hospital (like in a clinic), and you have any of these symptoms call your doctor or get medical help immediately. Be sure to mention that you have had a transfusion.

Delayed reactions can also happen long after the transfusion. If you feel unwell, have a fever, notice blood or tea-colored urine or have a yellow look to your skin, call you doctor.

### How can I avoid a transfusion?

Being anemic (e.g. low red blood cells count) at the time of surgery greatly increases your risk of needing a transfusion. Ask your doctor to check your blood for anemia long before your planned surgery (at least 3 months) so that anemia can be diagnosed and treated.

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Health PEI gratefully acknowledges the Nova Scotia Provincial Blood Coordinating Program (NSPBCP) [www.gov.ns.ca/health/nspbcpr/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/health/nspbcpr/) for the use of this patient guide.

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### WHAT IS A BLOOD TRANSFUSION?

A blood transfusion is when blood or a blood product is given to you through a needle into one of your veins.

### Why do I need a blood transfusion?

- It may be needed if your blood cells are not working properly or you do not have enough of them.
- You may have a health problem that causes you to need red blood cells, platelets, plasma, or blood products such as clotting factors.

### How is blood donated and screened?

In Canada, blood is donated by healthy volunteers at Canadian Blood Services (CBS) or Hema-Quebec. Donors are asked a series of questions to find out if they are healthy enough to donate their blood. After they give their blood it is tested for diseases such as Hepatitis, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), syphilis, HTLV (Human T Cell Lymphotropic

Virus) and West Nile Virus. Each donation will make red blood cells, plasma, platelet or blood product. Your doctor will order one of these based on your needs.

### Other types of Blood Donations:

If you are having surgery that is scheduled, “Autologous Donation” may be available through Canadian Blood Services (CBS). This involves donating your own blood so it is available if you need it, however, necessary arrangements must be made by your surgeon to ensure the criteria are met. Family members sometimes ask if they can donate blood for a loved one. This is known as “Directed Donation” and is provided by CBS in very limited circumstances. Please talk to your surgeon to determine if this is available for you and have him or her explain the alternatives to transfusion. People interested in becoming a blood donor can call Canadian Blood Services (CBS) at 1-888-2-Donate (1-888-236-6283).

### What is blood made up of?

Everyone’s blood is made up of several parts, including:

- **Red blood cells** that carry oxygen around in your body
- **White blood cells** that help fight infection
- **Platelets** that help your body to clot
- **Plasma** that contains hormones and proteins that fight infection or help your blood clot.

While healthcare providers work hard to keep patients safe in Prince Edward Island hospitals, it is still a good idea to ask the following questions before you receive a blood transfusion:

### Why am I getting a blood transfusion?

Your doctor will talk with you about why you need a transfusion, how it will help you and what risks may be involved. The doctor will ask you to sign a consent form (give permission). *Please ask questions if there is any part of your treatment you do not understand.*

### What is my blood type?

Your blood will be tested with donated blood to make sure the match is okay. This is called cross-matching. It is important to know your own blood type so be sure to ask your doctor about this.

