

# Will your child need a blood transfusion?



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Like all medical treatments, a blood transfusion should only be given if it is essential, and there are no alternative options. The decision to give your child a blood transfusion should only be made after careful consideration, in consultation with you. The risks to your child in having a blood transfusion will be balanced against the risks of not having one. Your child's doctor or nurse should explain to you why it is thought your child needs a transfusion, what the alternatives might be and seek your consent (and your child's if appropriate). Please ask if they do not.

**NHS**

**Blood and Transplant**

Dear Parent,

Having a child in hospital is a difficult time for everyone in the family. If your child needs to receive a blood transfusion during their treatment, you may have a number of questions about it.

To try to help, we have created these information booklets.

This cover booklet '*Will your child need a blood transfusion?*', is for you and tells you in detail what is involved. 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 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 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 which one may help your child.

Kind regards,

*Kate Pendry*

Kate Pendry  
Clinical Director,  
Patient Blood Management.

*Rebecca Gerrard*

Rebecca Gerrard  
National Lead:  
Patient Blood Management Team.

NHS Blood and Transplant is a Special Health Authority responsible for the safe and reliable supply of blood, blood products and associated services to the NHS.

## 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 other fluids. Over the next few weeks the body makes new red blood cells to replace those that are lost.

If larger amounts of blood are lost, a transfusion is the best way of replacing the blood rapidly.

Blood transfusions may be given to replace blood lost in surgery or after serious accidents, or they may be used to treat anaemia (lack of red blood cells) caused by failure of the body to make enough working blood cells.

Some medical treatments or operations cannot be safely carried out without giving a blood transfusion.

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

- Help your child to eat a well-balanced diet in the weeks before their operation. A leaflet called *'Iron in your diet'* is available from NHS Blood and Transplant, which gives further advice on this.
- Your child may need to have their iron levels boosted – ask your child's doctor or senior nurse for advice, especially if you know that your child has had low iron levels in the past.
- If your child is taking blood-thinning or anti-inflammatory medicines, stopping these drugs may reduce the amount of bleeding during or after the operation; but please ask your child's doctor or senior nurse if it is safe to stop these medicines before their operation. Please remember, for your child's safety, only a qualified medical professional 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 available in the hospital or if it is suitable for your child's case.



## 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 child's immune system and bone marrow, resulting in bone marrow failure. It is better to avoid this risk.

## Are blood transfusions safe?

Yes, the risk that a blood transfusion will make your child ill is very low. One of the most important ways of ensuring a safe transfusion is to make sure your child gets the right blood. To ensure that your child receives the correct blood, staff will check your child's identity, both when they take blood samples and before the transfusion is given. This is why it is important that your child wears an identification band. If you are with your child, you may also be asked to confirm their full name and date of birth. Please remind the nurse or doctor to ask you this if they do not do so.

Compared to other everyday risks, the likelihood of getting an infection from a blood transfusion is very low. All blood donors are unpaid volunteers and the risk of viral infections has almost been eliminated as a result of careful donor selection and testing.

It is calculated that hepatitis B might be passed on by fewer than 1 in 1.3 million blood donations. To put this in perspective, you are more likely to die in a gas incident (fire, explosion or carbon monoxide poisoning) than to get hepatitis B from a blood transfusion (Health and Safety Executive, 2010 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/education/statistics.htm#various>). The risk is many times smaller for HIV (1 in 6.5 million) and hepatitis C (1 in 28 million) (figures published October 2012).

The risk of getting variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) from a blood transfusion is extremely low. Each year, approximately 2.5 million units of blood components are transfused in the United Kingdom and there have been only a handful of cases where patients are known to have become infected with vCJD. More information on variant CJD can be found here: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Creutzfeldt-Jakob-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx>.



## How is blood given?

A blood transfusion is usually given through a tiny tube directly into a vein. The amount of time each transfusion takes will depend on a variety of factors; your child's doctor or nurse will be able to tell you more about this. Your child may be given more than one bag of blood as part of their treatment.

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

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

Your child may be afraid of needles, 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. Many hospitals have a dedicated Hospital Transfusion Team, and they may be able to come and discuss your concerns with you.

## How can I 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)

*A big thank you to the Australian Red Cross for allowing us to use their photograph of the two children reading the books within the pack. Thanks also to the children, parents and medical staff from the Rainbow Ward at Newham General Hospital for allowing us to photograph them during their transfusions and a special thanks also goes to Upper 3N class at Maynard School, Exeter for their help in the creation of these publications.*



## 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

[www.blood.co.uk/about-blood/information-for-patients/](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 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)

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 [www3.access-24.co.uk](http://www3.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 obtain 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, reliable and efficient supply of blood and associated services to the NHS in England and North Wales. We are the organ donor organisation for the UK and are responsible for matching and allocating donated organs. We rely on thousands of members of the public who voluntarily donate their blood, organs, tissues and stem cells.

### For more information

Visit [nhsbt.nhs.uk](http://nhsbt.nhs.uk)

Email [enquiries@nhsbt.nhs.uk](mailto:enquiries@nhsbt.nhs.uk)

Call **0300 123 23 23**