

# FACTSHEET

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## Blood transfusion

### What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion is a way of giving a small amount of one person's blood to another person who needs it. Your doctor will discuss the need for blood before it is given to your child. You will be asked to sign a consent (permission) form, before your child is given a blood transfusion.

### Why does my child need a blood transfusion?

Blood transfusions are often given to save the lives of people who have serious problems.

Your child might need blood if:

- they have lost a lot of blood e.g. bleeding during major surgery or after a bad accident
- they are not making enough blood e.g. some illnesses such as cancer or sickle cell anaemia affect the body's ability to produce blood
- they are breaking down their own blood e.g. haemolytic anaemia

Sometimes small babies that are born prematurely might need a blood transfusion to stay healthy while they grow.

### What are blood components?

Blood has different parts and each part has a job to do. A blood component is a term used to describe one part of blood. The components are:

- **Red Blood Cells** - carry oxygen around the body. They may be given when there is bleeding or anaemia (low numbers of red blood cells).
- **Platelets** – are cells that help to stop or prevent bleeding.

- **Plasma** – is used to help blood form a clot. It may be used with platelets to prevent or stop bleeding.
- **Albumin** – is a protein in the plasma and can be given to help increase the albumin levels if they are low within the blood. Albumin levels are important to maintain, as they keep fluid in the blood stream.

Generally, when your doctor refers to a "blood transfusion", they are referring to a red blood cell transfusion. Your child may need transfusions of other blood components as well. Your doctor will discuss this with you if they are needed.

### Are blood transfusions safe?

Australia has one of the safest blood supplies in the world. All blood donors are carefully screened and are not allowed to donate if they do not meet the criteria. All donated blood in Australia is then tested very carefully by the Australian Red Cross Blood Service to check for infection.

Each blood donation is tested for hepatitis C, hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS and other infections that may be transmitted from blood.

If any donated blood fails testing, it is not used. This is done to make sure that the highest standards in safety are maintained.

When your doctor talks to you about consent they will talk to you about the rare risks and complications and the importance of the blood for your child's condition.

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## Are there other alternatives?

There are some limited alternatives to a red blood cell transfusion that may be used. For example, if your child is anaemic due to low iron stores in the body, iron medicine can be given to help improve red cell numbers.

Each child has different needs and sometimes the risk of not having a blood transfusion may be greater than the risk of having one. It is important to speak to your child's doctor about any alternatives.

## What happens during a transfusion?

Before your child is given a transfusion they will need to have a blood test to find out their blood type and find the best suitable match of blood. It is important that your child's full name and date of birth are checked carefully when this is done. You may be asked to check this when the blood has been collected.

Before the transfusion is given to your child, two nurses/medical staff will carefully check that the details on the blood pack match the details on the order and your child's wrist band.

The transfusion will be given through an IV (commonly referred to as a drip/cannula). One pack of blood (a unit) will be given over 1- 4 hours. During this time a nurse will monitor your child regularly.

## Are there any side effects?

Your child should not feel any pain when the blood goes in. However some children may develop a fever or a rash. These are usually due to an allergic reaction and can be easily treated with medications, such as paracetamol or an antihistamine. Alternatively, slowing down the transfusion may help the transfusion be tolerated by the child.

Severe reactions to transfusion are rare. All staff responsible for giving blood transfusions are specially trained to manage transfusion reactions.

## What if I am still worried?

If you or your child are still worried about receiving a blood transfusion, speak to your child's doctor or nurse and they will be able to give you more specific information on blood transfusions.

Helpful Internet Sites

Australian Red Cross Blood Service at [www.transfusion.com.au](http://www.transfusion.com.au) or [www.donateblood.com.au](http://www.donateblood.com.au)

## Remember

- Speak to your child's Doctor if you have any concerns.
- Australia has a safe blood supply as each donation is carefully tested.
- Severe reactions to Blood Transfusion are rare. However your child will be closely watched and if they do happen, doctors and nurses are trained to recognise and respond to them immediately.