



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

BLOOD DONATION – NHS BLOOD AND TRANSPLANT

Why do we need donated blood?

Everyone knows blood is literally a lifesaver for those who have been in an accident or need it to help survive treatments and operations. But for some, whose illness has no cure and that last battle they face just cannot be won, a blood transfusion can help to improve their quality of life during their final months, weeks or even days. Last year 1.6 million donors gave blood – that's just 2.3% of the eligible population. Less than 3% of blood donated in the UK comes from the black African/Caribbean and south Asian communities

Every day NHS Blood and Transplant needs 6,000 people to attend donation sessions to keep the supply to hospitals in line with demand, because the need for donated blood is constant, not just in emergencies.

NHS Blood and Transplant collects and supplies blood across England and North Wales and relies completely on the altruism of donors.

What is blood?

The body has around 4-6 litres (8.5-12.5 pints) of blood. A bag of blood, as most people recognise it, is rarely used these days, only in cases of severe blood loss. Usually it is separated into its individual components. These are:

Red cells

Red blood cells carry oxygen to the body's organs and tissues. The inside of the red blood cell is filled with the protein haemoglobin.

They are used in the treatment of all kinds of anaemia which cannot be medically corrected, such as when rheumatoid arthritis or cancer is involved, when red cells break down in a new-born and for sickle cell disease. They are also essential to replace lost red cells after such things as accidents, surgery and after childbirth, not to mention pre-operative top ups for existing anaemic patients and for burn victims.

White cells

White blood cells are the body's defence system. They play a role in fighting infection and are vital for a healthy immune system.

Platelets

Platelets are small cells that help blood to clot and stop bleeding at cuts. They are needed for patients who have had bone marrow failure, for post transplant and chemotherapy treatments and leukaemia. These are all instances when platelets can be of huge benefit to the recipient.

Plasma

Blood cells float in a straw-coloured liquid called plasma. Plasma consists of water and many dissolved substances required in the body. Plasma is used after obstetric loss of blood (which is usually childbirth), during cardiac surgery and to reverse any anti-coagulant treatment. It is also used to replace clotting factors after massive transfusions or when they are not being sufficiently produced, such as liver disease.

Blood groups

There are four main blood groups: A, B, AB and O. Each of these can be positive or negative, so there are eight different variations of blood in total. Blood types react differently to each other, so some are incompatible with others. O negative can safely be given to anyone. Some blood groups are more common among some ethnic communities, so donations from people of all backgrounds are needed.

What happens when you go to give blood?

When you arrive, you'll be asked to read a number of leaflets and fill in a Donor Health Check (DHC) questionnaire and may have a confidential discussion with a nurse. All answers are treated in the strictest confidence.

A tiny drop of blood is taken from your fingertip. This allows us to check your haemoglobin levels and ensure that giving blood won't make you anaemic.

If you are female, under 20, less than 168cm in height and weigh less than 65kg, you will need to have an extra check to estimate your blood volume. This is to ensure that you will not have any negative effects from a unit of blood being taken, such as fainting.

This rule applies to young women in this age group as they tend to have lower blood volumes than older women or young men. The extra check does not mean you can't donate – it's for the donor's welfare.

If all is well, you will be able to donate blood. You will donate about 470ml of blood - this amount of blood is quickly replaced by your body.

Once you have given blood, you should have a short rest before being given some refreshments usually a drink and biscuits. All in all giving blood shouldn't take more than an hour.

Please remember to have something to eat and drink before you give blood.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

What is donated blood used for?

Hospitals and doctors need donated blood to treat a lot of different illnesses, and it's also used in surgical operations. On most days, there is less than a week's supply of blood in the UK's blood banks.

How do I give blood?

Giving blood is quick, easy and most importantly, it saves lives. Simply visit www.blood.co.uk or call us on 0300 123 23 23.

We will then send you details of your nearest venues for you to choose to attend.

When you go along, you will be guided through by a Donor Carer or a Nurse.

Alternatively, take our Virtual Tour at <http://www.blood.co.uk/virtualsession>.

Who can give blood?

Most people can give blood. If you are generally in good health, age 17 to 65 (if it's your first time) and weigh at least 7st 12lb you can donate.

Will I be asked a lot of questions before I give blood?

We will ask you a number of questions, but we promise to get through it all as quickly as possible. Our primary concerns are that giving blood will not harm you in any way and that your blood will be safe for patients.

What if I take medication?

Do tell us if you are on any kind of medication whether from your doctor or over the counter from your pharmacist, internet or health shop. Some of these may affect your blood and may mean we cannot take your donation. For more information please call NHS Blood and Transplant on 0300 123 23 23.

Can I bring a friend?

You are welcome to be accompanied by a friend, but please be aware that space on a bloodmobile is very limited.

How often can I give blood?

NHS Blood and Transplant advise donors to donate at an average of 16 weeks or more. Men can give four times a year and women three times. Donors who attend at intervals of less than 16 weeks may be at risk of iron deficiency.

How much blood will be taken?

Only about 470 ml, which is just under a pint. Your body will replace the lost fluid in a very short period of time.

How will giving blood affect my health?

If you are fit and healthy, you should not experience any problems whatsoever.

What if I develop an infection after I donate?

If you become unwell within two weeks of your donation, or if you believe there is any reason why your blood should not be transfused to a patient, please call NHS Blood and Transplant on 0300 123 23 23.

What if I feel faint when I get home?

You need to take it easy for a few hours after giving blood, but if you do feel faint or dizzy, lie down immediately with your legs raised. Ideally, let someone else know if you are feeling unwell. If faintness persists after your donation, don't hesitate to call NHS Blood and Transplant on 0300 123 23 23 to let them know and they will be able to advise you further.

What can I do before and after giving blood?

Be sure to eat at your regular mealtimes and drink plenty of fluids before and after donating, but avoid alcohol.

Can I smoke after giving blood?

NHS Blood and Transplant advise that you refrain from smoking for about two hours after donating, as it might make you feel dizzy or faint.

Can I go back to work on the same day?

Most people feel fine after donating and you can resume your normal activity as long as you feel well. But do avoid heavy lifting, pushing or picking up heavy objects for at least four hours after donating. However you should not give blood if you are undertaking a hazardous activity that day. This includes hobbies such as climbing, flying or diving or occupations, such as driving a crane, HGV or emergency services vehicle and certain building workers.

Where does my blood go?

Your blood will be taken to one of NHS Blood and Transplant's blood centres up and down the country. To protect patients, your blood is tested for HIV, hepatitis B and C, certain other infectious diseases and syphilis.

Once the blood has been sorted into its different types, and all the tests are clear, it is then distributed to hospitals to meet their predicted demand. There your blood is matched to a particular patient who requires a transfusion. You can view the current stock levels on www.blood.co.uk.

I have heard that the donor's ethnic origin is requested. Why does this matter?

The ethnic origin of donors is medically important because it makes it easier for NHS Blood and Transplant to find and match blood for recipients with rarer blood groups. Secondly, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 means that they have to monitor the accessibility of their services to all communities, including how well they provide opportunities to donate blood. All personal donor information remains confidential, and is seen and used only by NHS Blood and Transplant staff and those they work closely with in providing their services. If you prefer not to give them this information, let them know so that they do not ask you again.

I am a vegetarian, can I give blood?

There is no problem with vegetarians giving blood. The red blood cells, which require iron from the stores in your body, will need to be replaced after the donation. Provided you eat a well-balanced diet sufficient in iron, then you should be able to replenish your iron supply before your next donation.

Why are people who have or think they may have received a blood transfusion since 1980 no longer able to give blood?

This step was implemented by all four of the UK Blood Services on 2nd August 2004. It is a further precautionary measure against the possible risk of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) being transmitted by blood and blood products. vCJD is thought to be the consequence of eating contaminated beef, related to BSE (or mad cow disease) in UK cattle after 1980. Fortunately, vCJD is very rare. But, there is evidence that vCJD may be transmitted from an infected blood donor to the patient, via transfusion.

Exclusion of Men who have Sex with Men from blood donation

NHS Blood and Transplant has a duty to ensure a sufficient supply of safe blood for patients in England and North Wales. This includes a clear responsibility to minimise the risk of a blood transfusion transmitting an infection to patients.

Whilst their stringent testing procedures make such transmissions extremely rare, they believe that any transmission is one too many. However, it is also important that the policies which are in place to help protect the safety of the blood supply are based on the best available scientific evidence, reviewed on a regular basis, and explained clearly to the public.

The Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO) is responsible for regularly reviewing the major criteria for accepting blood donors and for recommendations to the four UK Health Ministers on blood donation policy.

SaBTO say that men who have had anal or oral sex with another man in the past 12 months, with or without a condom, are asked not to donate blood. Men whose last sexual contact with another man was more than 12 months ago are eligible to donate, subject to meeting the other donor selection criteria.

In early 2018, the criteria will change again, as set out below. Until early 2018, the current criteria apply.

Deferral Criteria	Current deferral period/ testing regime	Recommended deferral period
A man who has had oral or anal sex with another man (with or without condom)	12 months	3 months
Someone who has had sex for money or drugs	Permanent	3 months
Sex with a <u>high risk</u> partner	12 months	3 months
Sex with a partner who has been sexually active in areas where HIV is common	12 months	3 months

At blood donation sessions, all donors are asked to complete a questionnaire called the donor health check, to assess whether they meet the donor selection criteria. This is to ensure that the supply of blood to hospitals is as safe as possible.