

Babies Receiving a Blood Transfusion

What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion involves blood being given through a tube into the bloodstream. Transfusion has been recommended because it is the best option for your baby at this point.

Do I need to give consent for a blood transfusion?

Yes, consent is necessary prior to your baby being given a transfusion. Consider the following statements and if you have any doubts, please ask your clinical team.

- ✓ I understand why transfusion has been recommended and other possible options for treatment.
- ✓ I am aware of the expected benefits of a transfusion for my baby.
- ✓ I am aware of the potential risks and side effects.
- ✓ I am aware of which blood products will be transfused to my baby.
- ✓ I am aware of how the transfusion will be given and how long it will take.

In an emergency, there may not be time to discuss your baby's transfusion and obtain your consent. However, the reasons for the transfusion will be explained to you as soon as possible.

Which blood product might my baby receive?

After blood is collected from a donor it is separated into parts so your baby only receives the part that they need.

Red blood cells

Red blood cells carry oxygen around the body. A low number of red blood cells results in anaemia. Some causes of anaemia include prematurity, blood loss and increased red cell breakdown (haemolytic disease of the newborn).

Platelets

Platelets help to stop bleeding by forming a clot. A low platelet count can be due to too few platelets being made, too many being used or too many being destroyed. Some causes include infection and antibodies.

Plasma (fresh frozen plasma, cryoprecipitate)

Plasma is the liquid part of blood containing important proteins. It may be required in acute bleeding where proteins in the plasma are reduced.

Plasma products

Plasma products are concentrated blood proteins. Each product has a specific purpose:

- Albumin helps maintain fluid levels.
- Immunoglobulins help the immune system.
- Clotting factors are for treating specific bleeding problems.

Are transfusions safe?

Australian Red Cross Lifeblood collects blood for transfusion in Australia from voluntary donors. Our blood supply is one of the safest in the world and most babies will have no complications during or after their transfusion.

Although transfusions are generally very safe, there are some associated risks. However, precautions are taken to avoid any complications. There are three key risks to be aware of:

Having a reaction

Reactions are uncommon and can range from mild to severe. Mild reactions are the most common and include a rash or slight fever. Severe reactions include breathing difficulties, high fever and severe allergy (anaphylaxis).

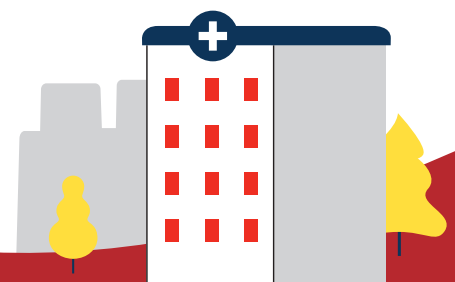
Your baby will be carefully monitored during and after the transfusion. Alert the nursing staff if you have any concerns about your baby during the transfusion.

Catching an infection

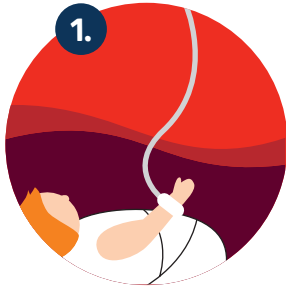
In Australia, blood is carefully screened for infections. This includes screening donors and testing the blood after it has been donated. The risk of catching any diseases such as Hepatitis C or HIV is less than one in a million.

Receiving the wrong blood product

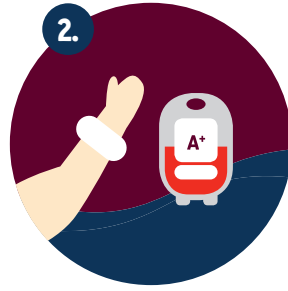
This is a rare occurrence and is usually caused by a checking error. This is prevented by multiple checks in the laboratory and at the bedside prior to beginning a transfusion. It is important that your baby is wearing an identification band throughout the process.



How is blood given?



1. Your baby will need a small plastic tube placed into a vein.



2. The blood product will be carefully checked to make sure it matches your baby's blood.



3. The transfusion will begin.



4. Your baby will be closely monitored. We usually observe no change in the baby during their transfusion.



5. The transfusion will take less than four hours.



6. If you have any concerns about your baby at any stage of the process, alert nursing staff immediately.

Frequently asked questions

Will this transfusion affect my baby in the future?

A transfusion will be given only if medically necessary. From what we know so far, there are limited long-term effects. If your baby needs a transfusion in the future, remember to mention that they have had one before as it may influence which blood is given.

Will the blood transfusion affect the newborn screening test?

Yes, there is a chance it might. This test is usually done between 48–72 hours after birth. If the blood spot sample has not yet been taken, your baby will need it done before receiving a transfusion. They may also need a further sample after transfusion.

Can I donate blood to my baby?

The risks from receiving blood from donors provided by Lifeblood is extremely low, so parents' blood is not used. In addition, there are some increased risks of rare transfusion reactions when babies receive blood from relatives.

