

General Information on Blood Transfusion

What is blood transfusion?

Blood transfusion is the process of infusing whole blood or blood components (red blood cells, platelets, plasma) prescribed by your doctor into your vein in order to achieve a therapeutic effect.

Why would doctors give blood transfusion?

Red blood cells carry the oxygen in your blood to your vital organs. They can alleviate the symptoms of anaemia and bleeding.

Platelets can prevent or stop bleeding by forming blood clots at the site of an injury. Platelet transfusion may be required for those who have a low number of platelets or whose platelets do not work efficiently.

Plasma is a fluid that contains many substances including the clotting factors that help blood to clot.

Dependent upon the clinical conditions, blood transfusions are given to replace blood that has been lost or to correct serious or life threatening conditions due to low blood counts or deficiency of clotting factor(s). Your doctor will prescribe a blood transfusion according to your clinical condition.

What are the risks of receiving blood transfusion?

Blood supply and safety in Hong Kong have been maintained at a standard similar to most developed countries in Europe and North America. The Hong Kong Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service only collects blood from volunteer non-remunerated donors. Before giving blood, donors are assessed by a health enquiry questionnaire and interviewed about their health and risk factors for diseases. Blood is collected under stringent procedure and then subjected to extensive testing in accordance with well established international standards. Should your doctor decide that you need blood transfusion, a blood sample will be taken from you for the hospital blood bank to cross match for blood that is compatible to your blood group.

Similar to other medical procedures or treatment, blood transfusion does carry risks, no matter how small. Below is a list of transfusion related risks for your reference:

Allergy

This is usually a mild reaction (e.g. skin rash and itching) and is easily controlled with drugs. Severe allergic reactions are very rare (less than 1 in 100,000). It may, however, be life threatening in rare circumstances.

Haemolysis

If the donor and your blood groups are mismatched, the donor red cells will be destroyed by your body after infusing into your body. This reaction is called haemolysis. Severe haemolytic reaction is exceptionally rare, at an incidence of less than 1 in 100,000. However, it can result in kidney failure and other serious complications that may be life-threatening if this occurs. The hospital blood bank will ensure that the correct blood is given to prevent this type of reaction by meticulous testing.

Fever

Some patients may feel chills and feverish during or shortly after blood transfusion. It will often subside without any consequence.

Other

Transfusion related acute lung injury (TRALI) is rarely seen in Chinese.

What are the risks of not having a transfusion?

In simple terms, the purpose of giving blood transfusion to you is to replenish the blood or blood component(s) you need. Red blood cells carry the oxygen in your blood to your vital organs, such as the brain or heart. A decrease in oxygen can result in damage to these organs. If you have a low platelet count or a deficiency in clotting factor, you are at a higher chance of bleeding. In some cases, this can result in serious major organ damage. Transfusion may be needed to prevent such damage.

Remarks: Should you have any enquiries, please consult your doctor.

Reference

General Information on Blood Transfusion (Version 1.2) by Central Transfusion Committee of Hospital Authority (2008).
(Retrieved from http://www.ekg.org.hk/pilic/public/BT_PILIC/BldTransfusion_0052_eng.pdf)

Compiled by Union Hospital Consent Form Taskforce

The above information is for reference only, please enquire your physician for details

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