

Reactions to Blood and Blood Products

When you receive a blood transfusion there is a chance that you may have a reaction. Most reactions are mild but some can be very bad. Your doctor will weigh the benefits against the risks before giving you a transfusion.

This pamphlet tells how you can help your doctor prevent a reaction. It also tells you what symptoms to look for.

Symptoms

Tell your nurse or doctor if you have any of these symptoms during or shortly after your transfusion.

- rash
- itching
- hives
- fever
- chills
- shakes
- headache
- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- back pain
- chest pain
- stomach pain
- feel light headed
- feel short of breath
- feel faint

Reactions

Mild reactions to blood are common.

Mild allergic reactions happen as often as 1 in 100 transfusions.

A fever happens as often as 1 in 300 red blood cell transfusions and 1 in 2 platelet transfusions.

For more details on the risk of transfusion reactions, please see the pamphlet "Blood and Blood Products".

Prevention

Other reactions can be worse but some can be avoided. You need to tell your doctor if you had any of these problems:

- **You had a rash, hives, or itching with a previous transfusion.** You may be given an antihistamine, like Benadryl®, to prevent another reaction.
- **You had a fever, chills, or shakes with a previous transfusion.** You may be given Tylenol® to prevent this type of reaction.
- **You have Anti-IgA antibodies** Special blood products can be given to patients with this problem.
- **You have heart problems or long-term anemia.** You may be given medication to prevent fluid from building up in your lungs. You may also be transfused at a slower rate.
- **There was a delay getting blood for you in the past.** If this happened, the lab may need extra time to find the right blood for you.
- **You had or will be having a bone marrow or stem cell transplant. You have an Immune Deficiency disease.** You may need special blood products ordered.

Investigation

If you have a reaction we will look for a cause. You will need to give an extra blood and urine sample to send to the lab.

Some reactions may need to be reported to the Canadian Blood Services for more testing.



TRANSFUSION REACTIONS
TO
BLOOD AND BLOOD PRODUCTS

Prepared by the Transfusion Committee of the Health Care
Corporation of St. John's

February 2005
Version 1.0