



Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) Testing

What is HBV?

Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused by the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV). The virus is most commonly transmitted from mother to child during birth and delivery, as well as through contact with blood or other body fluids during sex with an infected partner, unsafe injections or exposures to sharp instruments.

HBV often does not cause any obvious symptoms in adults, and typically passes in a few months without treatment. However, in children, it can persist for years and eventually cause serious liver damage.

HBV is common in many parts of the world including South and South-East Asia, the Middle and Far East, southern Europe and Africa, but it is less common in Scotland.

Why do you test for HBV?

The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service's (SNBTS) priority is to provide safe blood for patients. We know that HBV can be transmitted by transfusion of blood, platelets or plasma so we test for this each time you come to give blood.

How do you test for HBV?

- Since 1972, we have tested blood donors for Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg). This is the protein which coats the virus.

- In 2010, we also began testing for HBV DNA, the genetic code of the virus itself. This increased our ability to detect donors with active HBV.
- In 2022, we will start testing all donors for anti-Hepatitis B core (anti-HBc) antibodies. This will allow us to identify donors who have previously had HBV.

What happens after you test my blood?

Donors with negative results

Most donors have negative HBV test results and hear no more from us (we only get in touch if your HBV test is positive). If all test results are satisfactory, we can use your gift to treat patients and you can keep giving blood.

False reactions

On occasion, the tests used in SNBTS will produce false positive results. Because of our operational procedures, SNBTS cannot use a donation if it gives a false reaction. If a donor's blood causes a false reaction, we will write to let you know. The false reaction does not mean that there is anything wrong with your health, and there is no need for you to see a doctor or have any additional tests. You will be able to donate again once the reaction has cleared, and we will check this by taking samples rather than a full donation when you next come to give blood.



Donors with positive results

Active HBV

We rarely find donors with positive HBsAg and HBV DNA results. If we do, our donor medical team will get in touch to tell you your results, what they mean for you, and what needs to happen next. They will ask permission to tell your GP, and to refer you to appropriate follow-up services. They will also give you information which helps to explain your test results and diagnosis. SNBTS is required by law to notify Public Health Scotland whenever anyone is diagnosed with HBV. Unfortunately, you will no longer be able to give blood.

Previous HBV

We expect that only a small number of donors will have had previous HBV infection. Most people who have anti-HBc antibodies will have cleared HBV; have undetectable levels of virus in their bloodstream; and will have experienced no symptoms.

If you are found positive for anti-HBc antibodies, our donor medical team will get in touch to tell you your results, and what they mean for you. They will also ask permission to tell your GP.

You won't need any routine medical reviews or treatment as you no longer have active infection. However, you will no longer be eligible to give blood. This decision has been made to allow us to begin the complex testing programme promptly and safely and may be reviewed in the future.

We understand it can be disappointing to be told you can no longer give blood. However, patients in Scotland would like to thank you for the donations you have given so far. Your support is really important to us and we would be very grateful if you could encourage your friends and family to donate on your behalf.



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NATL 301 01

Published April 2022