

Information for patients needing irradiated blood

Including important patient card
and patient record stickers



INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS NEEDING IRRADIATED BLOOD

This information leaflet has been produced to help answer questions you or your family may have regarding irradiated blood, platelets or other blood components.

Your medical team has requested that you should receive irradiated blood. This information has been added to your medical record but, as an extra precaution, you should always show the attached card to the medical team responsible for your care. Always ask if the blood transfusion you are receiving is irradiated before it is transfused.

Why is irradiated blood needed?

Irradiated blood is given to prevent transfusion-associated graft-versus-host disease (TA-GvHD).

What is TA-GvHD?

TA-GvHD is a rare but serious complication of blood transfusion caused by white blood cells (lymphocytes) in the transfused blood. Even a very small number of these cells may recognise the patient receiving the blood as 'different' and cause a severe illness or even death.

Which patients are at increased risk of TA-GvHD?

Some patients are at particular risk of TA-GvHD. These include:-

- patients receiving transfusions from family members and/or tissue type matched donors
- patients born with immune system disorders
- patients who have developed an immune system disorder, such as Hodgkin's disease or because of treatment with certain drugs or because of a bone marrow/stem cell transplant
- people who have received chemotherapy drugs such as flurabine
- unborn babies and babies needing exchange transfusions

For some patients the risk of TA-GvHD lasts only a short time. For others the risks remain life-long, e.g. patients with an immune system disorder and patients with Hodgkin's disease. In some situations the period of risk is not known and hospitals may make different recommendations for some groups of patients.

Your medical team will advise you whether you, your child or relative needs irradiated blood and for how long.

How does irradiation work?

Irradiation of blood prevents lymphocytes (a type of white blood cell) dividing and causing harm in the recipient.

Is all blood routinely irradiated?

No. Red cell transfusions are not routinely irradiated and need to be irradiated 'on demand' for patients at risk of TA-GvHD. It is important that you remind your medical team of your need for irradiated blood as they need to order it specially.

In Scotland, all platelets are irradiated but this is not true everywhere and you should check if you need platelets when travelling. All granulocyte (white cell) and tissue type matched transfusions are routinely irradiated.

Plasma products such as fresh frozen plasma, anti-D, albumin and immunoglobulin do not cause TA-GvHD and, therefore, do not need to be irradiated.

Does irradiation damage the blood?

Irradiation does not cause any significant damage. The blood does not become 'radioactive' and will not harm you or anyone around you.

What if blood is needed in an emergency?

Although irradiated blood is recommended for you, if you receive non-irradiated blood the risk of TA-GvHD is very small. In emergencies, there may not be enough time to arrange for irradiated blood to be provided as it may be more important to provide blood quickly. The medical team treating you will judge the balance of these risks.



▼ Bend sheet back across here to peel off card ▼

**I am at risk of
transfusion-associated
graft-versus-host disease**

**If I need to have a blood transfusion,
cellular blood components
(Red Cells and Platelets)
MUST BE GAMMA IRRADIATED**



Please inform your
blood transfusion laboratory

Please detach the above card, complete the details on the reverse and hand to the patient. This card must be shown to the patient's medical team before each transfusion.

**This patient is at risk of
transfusion-associated
graft-versus-host disease**

**If this patient needs to have a blood
transfusion, cellular blood components
(Red Cells and Platelets)
MUST BE GAMMA IRRADIATED**



Please inform your
blood transfusion laboratory

**This patient is at risk of
transfusion-associated
graft-versus-host disease**

**If this patient needs to have a blood
transfusion, cellular blood components
(Red Cells and Platelets)
MUST BE GAMMA IRRADIATED**



Please inform your
blood transfusion laboratory

Please attach these stickers to the patient's notes.

Name _____

DoB __/__/__ Consultant _____

Hospital/NHS Number _____

Hospital for enquiries _____

Reason for irradiated blood _____

Irradiated blood needed indefinitely

or until __/__/__

Date of issue of card __/__/__

OTHER INFORMATION

If you are interested in finding out more about transfusion and have access to the Internet, you might find the following web sites useful:

Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service

<http://www.scotblood.co.uk>

National Blood Service (England)

<http://www.blood.co.uk>

NHS QIS Clinical Standards

<http://www.nhshealthquality.org>

British Blood Transfusion Society

<http://www.bbts.org.uk>

Handbook of Transfusion Medicine

<http://www.transfusionguidelines.org.uk>

Notes

You might want to make a note here of any questions you want to ask the nurse or doctor about your transfusion.

Contact Details:

Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service

0131 536 5700

This publication can also be made available in large print, braille (English only), audio tape and in different languages.

If you would like further information contact

The Public Affairs Department

Tel. 0141 357 7752

Ref. No. : CPIL 2009(4)

Version 1.0

Date Published May 09

