



Receiving A Blood Transfusion: What Patients Should Know

What is done to make sure the blood patients receive is safe?

Blood safety is regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration. Brattleboro Memorial Hospital uses blood supplied by the New Hampshire/Vermont Red Cross, which uses only volunteer donors.

Efforts to improve blood safety have reduced many risks, and are ongoing. Many tests are in place to reduce chances of contamination.

Before giving blood, donors are screened for a history to suggest disease. Only people meeting strict standards are allowed to donate blood.

Blood is tested for blood type and screened for infection. The screening tests of donated blood have grown and allow a great deal of safety. Some of the many tests include those for hepatitis B and C, syphilis, and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. If diseases are found, the blood is not used.

Before a patient receives blood, tests are done in the hospital lab to match the donated blood with that from the patient. Special pink wrist bands with each patient's own blood number for identification are attached to make sure that patient gets the exact blood tested for him or her.

During and after the transfusion, nurses check for signs of reactions. It is important for patients to tell nurses how they are feeling, and to ask any questions they have at any time.

What are the risks of receiving blood?

There is a small risk of allergic reaction or infection. When they do occur, symptoms are generally mild such as fever, chills or hives and require little or no treatment. Although very rare, more severe effects can occur.

The risk of disease transmission is also very small. For instance, the odds of getting Hepatitis B from a transfusion are 1 in 66,000 screened units of blood, the risk of Hepatitis C is 1 in 100,000, and the risk of HIV is 1 in 676,000.

What other choices do I have other than receiving blood from the donated blood supply?

If you are to have surgery in the near future, you may be able to donate your own blood to be used within a specific time for yourself. This is called autologous blood transfusion.

There is a range of products, drugs, and methods, which can sometimes be used instead of blood. Talk with your doctor or health care provider if you have questions.

Questions I want to ask:
