



Pēpi/Babies Requiring a Blood Transfusion

Parent/Caregiver/Whānau Information – Neonatal Services

What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion is when donated blood is given to your pēpi/baby. It is given into a vein, using a soft plastic tube. Typically a blood transfusion takes about 3-4 hours but it can be given more quickly or slowly if needed.

Why might my pēpi/baby need a blood transfusion?

Newborn pēpi/babies, especially if born early, are frequently anaemic (reduced number of red blood cells). This may be because of:

- After birth, there is a drop in the level of the hormone that stimulates the body to make red blood cells. This normal fall in the haemoglobin level does not usually cause any symptoms. However, in sick or premature pēpi/babies, the level can drop lower and longer causing symptoms.
- In some premature and sick pēpi/babies, the red blood cells break down faster than normal and they are not replaced at the same rate.
- Blood loss before or around the time of birth.



Pēpi/Babies who are unwell require a large number of blood tests to monitor their progress.

If your pēpi/baby needs an operation, a blood transfusion may be needed to replace any blood lost during surgery.

Why are red blood cells important?

Red blood cells are needed to carry oxygen around the body. Oxygen is needed for the function of the body's organs. Some pēpi/babies who are anaemic may look pale, appear short of breath, sleepy and not feed so well.

Are blood transfusions safe?

Almost always, yes. All blood donors are unpaid volunteers who are very carefully selected and tested to make sure that the blood they donate is as safe as possible.

What happens when my pēpi/baby has a blood transfusion?

Nurses will follow strict checking procedures to ensure your pēpi/baby receives the right blood. This is why it is important your pēpi/baby wears an identification band. If you are with your pēpi/baby, you may also be asked to confirm your pēpi/baby's full name and date of birth. If you decide to change your pēpi/baby's name for any reason, it is important to tell your nurse, so your pēpi/baby's records can be updated.

How is blood given?

It is usually given through a tiny tube that goes into a vein. Each bag of blood can take up to 4 hours to give, but can be safely given more quickly if needed. If your pēpi/baby needs more than one bag of blood, it is normally arranged for it to come from the same blood donor.

How will my pēpi/baby feel during their blood transfusion?

The majority of pēpi/babies will not feel any different but reactions to transfusion can sometimes occur.

Your pēpi/baby will be closely monitored, but please inform your nurse if you have any concerns about your pēpi/baby while they are receiving their blood transfusion.

Can I donate my blood to my pēpi/baby?

There are good reasons why this is not done. The risk of infection from blood donated by a relative is no lower than from an unrelated blood donor. There are increased risks of some types of serious reactions following blood transfusion from relatives, and it is very wise to avoid these.

Can my pēpi/baby receive a blood transfusion without my consent?

If your pēpi/baby needs a blood transfusion, and it is not urgent, you will be asked to give consent. However, if your pēpi/baby needs an urgent transfusion to save his/her life then it can be given without consent.

Platelets/Plasma

Sometimes a pēpi/baby needs a transfusion of blood component (other than red blood cells) which are given in special situations. If your pēpi/baby needs platelets to help prevent and stop bleeding or plasma to help blood to clot, this will be discussed with you.

If you have other worries about transfusions please tell your pēpi/baby's nurse or doctor. They are there to help care for your pēpi/baby and give you support.