Blood Transfusions for Preterm Babies

Sometimes when a baby is born early, he or she may need a blood transfusion during his or her hospital stay. Our doctors and nurses always give special care to avoid transfusions, but sometimes they are needed.

Reasons for a Blood Transfusion

- The baby may not produce enough red blood cells as quickly as they are needed by his or her developing body. Red blood cells carry oxygen in the blood to the rest of the body. The baby may be going through a stage of rapid growth or have a lower blood count than is healthy.
- The baby may need many blood tests to check his or her condition. A transfusion may be needed to replace the blood taken.
- The baby may need blood to replace blood lost during the birth process.
- Sometimes, blood transfusions are needed when a baby’s blood type is different from his or her mother’s. A blood transfusion may be part of the treatment needed to protect the baby’s health.
- Other conditions, such as infections, may also lead to transfusion.

About Blood Transfusions

Before the blood transfusion is given, you will have the process explained to you and be asked to give consent. Please ask any questions you may have.
Blood Transfusions Are Safe

To give the best possible care, your baby’s blood type will be checked against the blood used for transfusion. Many safety checks for the transfused blood will have occurred prior to giving it to your baby.

Sources of Blood

Blood transfusions come from a blood bank from either donated blood bank sources or from a direct donation.

- **Blood Bank:**
  
  At a blood bank, such as the American Red Cross, many donors give blood so that it can be used by others who need it. Blood bank blood goes through many safety checks and will be free from infection. The blood will be matched to the baby’s blood type.

- **Directed Donation:**

  Family members may donate blood just for your baby. Most women, who have just given birth, however, will not be able to donate blood. Donations are direct because after the blood is checked for safety and it matches the baby’s blood type, it can be transfused. Talk with the doctor if you are interested in direct donation.
  
  - Directed donations can not be used in emergency situations.
  - Blood donation, safety testing and processing, and transfusion may take up to 7 to 10 days.
  - If you are interested in using directed donation, several tests must be done at the donor's expense with a hospital lab. These tests make sure you are a match to the baby’s blood type.
  - Directed donors must weigh 110 lbs, be 16 years of age or older, and be in good health. Donors who are less than 18 years must have consent from a parent or guardian at the time of donation.
  - Directed donors must not have donated blood 56 days before the current donation.

How the Blood is Given to the Baby

The blood transfusion is given to the baby through an intravenous tube or IV. Your baby will be watched carefully for any changes during the transfusion. Your baby will also be assessed for comfort.
Reactions to blood transfusions in the preterm baby are very rare. You will want to let your baby’s doctor know after discharge that he or she was given a blood transfusion while in the hospital.

For More Information
If you have any questions or concerns about your baby having a blood transfusion, please discuss them with your baby’s nurse or doctor.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.