Transfusion of Blood / Blood Products

What is blood?

Human blood is made up of fluid called plasma that has red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets.

- Red Blood Cells carry oxygen from the lungs to other parts of the body and then carry carbon dioxide back to the lungs. If your red blood cell count drops too low (anemia), a transfusion of red blood cells can be given. A low red blood cell count may be from bleeding due to accidents or surgery, cancer, chemotherapy, or radiation therapy.

- Platelets control bleeding by fixing blood vessels that have been affected by injury or surgery.

- Plasma carries blood cells throughout the body and has proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Proteins and enzymes help blood to clot. Plasma is often used to treat problems with bleeding.

How safe is a blood transfusion?

Each blood donor is asked about his or her medical history. All donors are asked questions to see if they have any high-risk behaviors that will not let them be a donor. The donor will have a brief physical exam before giving blood to decide if they are able to donate. The blood type will be identified and carefully tested before it is sent to the hospital. Tests for hepatitis, syphilis, and the AIDS virus are part of the testing. There is a small, but real risk of becoming infected from a blood transfusion. All blood has been tested for the AIDS antibody since the spring of 1985.
How is blood transfused?

- Blood is collected and stored in special plastic bags. These bags are used only once and then thrown away.
- The donor blood type is crossmatched with your blood type to make sure it is okay for you to receive the blood.
- The blood flows through a filter and plastic tubing that is attached to a needle in your vein.
- The nurse will check on you often during your transfusion. The nurse will check your temperature, pulse, and blood pressure.
- It normally takes 8 hours to complete the process for patients receiving a blood transfusion, but it may take longer depending on what your doctor has ordered.