Transfusion of Blood / Blood Products

What is blood?

Human blood is made up of fluid called plasma. Plasma has red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. Plasma carries blood cells throughout your body and has proteins, vitamins, and minerals that help your blood to clot. Plasma is often used to treat problems with bleeding.

- **Red blood cells** carry oxygen from your lungs to other parts of your body and then carry carbon dioxide back to your 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 injury or surgery, cancer, chemotherapy, or radiation therapy.

- **White blood cells** fight infection and destroy bacteria and germs that enter your body.

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

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 donate blood. The donor will have a 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 virus 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 matched with your blood type to make sure it is okay for you to receive the blood.

- An intravenous (IV) catheter, a thin flexible tube, will be placed in your arm. The donor blood is then filtered and put into your IV.

- Your nurse will check on you often during your transfusion and check your temperature, pulse, and blood pressure.