

Keeping things **safe**



A new rule for blood donors

From 5th April 2004 we can no longer accept blood donations from people who have received blood during the course of any medical treatment or procedure in the UK since 1st January 1980.

If this new rule does not apply to you or even if you are not sure that it does then please let us know by calling our Donor Helpline on 0845 7 711 711 or complete and return the form at the back of this leaflet as you may well be able to continue giving blood. If you can't continue to give blood for the time being, above all we'd like to thank you for your amazing contribution to saving patients lives.

We are sorry that we have had to ask you to stop giving blood for the time being. This new rule has been introduced as a purely precautionary measure in light of the latest scientific information. Our aim is to ensure that patients always receive blood and blood products that are as safe as we can make them. In this instance we are reducing the possible risk of vCJD (variant Creutzfeld-Jacob disease) being passed from donor to patient.

As someone who has received blood yourself we realise that you may well be upset by not being able to give blood for the time being. However we hope you'll understand our commitment to keeping blood safe.

Please don't think of this as the end of your time as a blood donor. You see, just like our other rules regarding who can and can't give – things can change. As new scientific information comes to light, we will review this situation. This could mean either continuing not giving or asking you to come back. We just don't know yet.

About vCJD

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) is one of a group of diseases that affect the central nervous system. CJD cases have naturally occurred in several forms for many years. Fortunately, CJD in all its forms is very rare indeed.

The more recently occurring variant CJD (vCJD) is believed to be the consequence of eating contaminated beef, related to BSE (or mad cow disease) in UK cattle herds after 1980.

CJD is not like a cold, you can't catch it from people in the same room. There is no evidence of transmission by sex or from mother to baby at birth. However, person to person transmission can occur during medical procedures. There have been a small number of confirmed transmissions so far via instruments, tissue grafts and the use of human derived growth hormones. As receiving blood is a medical procedure, it follows that vCJD may infect a patient via blood. There is no definite proof, but it remains a possibility.

What we are doing about vCJD

Since 1997 the Blood Services of the UK have taken a number of precautionary measures, just in case:

1. The recall of any blood components from donors who later go on to develop vCJD
2. The importation of plasma from countries with few or no cases of BSE to manufacture blood products
3. The removal of white cells from the blood before it is transfused (white cells may carry vCJD infection)
4. The importation of plasma from countries with few or no cases of BSE for children born after January 1996

It wasn't until December 2003 that evidence came to light that a blood donor may have transmitted vCJD to a patient via a blood transfusion. Scientists are not 100% sure that this is the case as it is still possible that both donor and patient separately acquired vCJD by eating contaminated beef.

Even so, in light of this case we are now asking donors who have received blood in the UK since 1st January 1980 (the date BSE became present in the UK food chain) to stop giving blood. By doing this we will be excluding a group of people who have, potentially, a slightly higher chance of having been exposed to vCJD than those who have not received blood.

I have received blood. What does it mean to my health?

People who have received blood since 1980 belong to a large group that together has a potentially slightly higher risk of exposure to vCJD than the general population.

Just how small this risk is can be seen from the fact that in the last ten years, UK hospitals have used over 23 million units of blood, and yet the December 2003 case is the first ever recorded. And we are still not 100% sure that this was an actual transmission. And yet as small as the risk is, by excluding donors like yourself we can make the blood that patients receive that little bit safer. We are erring heavily on the side of caution.

Since 1997, a medical study has identified just a handful of patients who have received blood, from donors who were well at the time they gave blood but some time later went on to develop vCJD. All of those patients have been informed, and to date only one of them has possibly been infected by vCJD from the blood they received. In all the years of giving blood to patients we have always tried to make the blood as safe as possible whilst meeting demand. The simple fact is that for years blood has saved millions of lives and will continue to do so.

What are the chances of me having infected a patient with my blood?

Please don't worry, the chances of this are very, very small. As you can see from the information above, the likelihood of anything being transmitted is minute.

The UK has an exceptionally good track record of safe blood. Like any medical procedure, blood transfusion, does have a small risk associated with it but to make sure blood is as safe as possible we have extremely tight tests and controls. We constantly review our safety methods to ensure that they are appropriate to any new problems that may emerge, such as vCJD. And of course any risk associated with receiving blood is balanced with the risk of not receiving it at the time it's needed.

And remember, without blood donors like you coming forward time and again to help patients, many lives would have been lost.

You are still allowing people that are not sure if they have received blood, to donate. Why?

We have decided not to exclude people who are not sure because our research shows that if we did we could seriously reduce blood stocks and the last thing we want to do is run out of blood. To lose these people's donations is simply not justified by the even smaller risk associated with people who are not sure that they have received blood.

If you are not sure that you received blood in the UK after 1st January 1980 then please let us know by calling our Donor Helpline on 0845 7 711 711 or complete and return the form at the back of this leaflet donor as you may well be able to continue giving blood.

Can blood donors catch vCJD from giving blood?

No. All blood donations are taken using sterile, non-reusable needles and equipment. Giving blood carries no risk of catching vCJD.

If you're not sure, let us know

If you now think that you may have received blood but are not sure, you may well be able to continue giving blood. Please let us know immediately by completing and returning the form opposite or calling us on **0845 7 711 711**

Keeping in touch

We would very much like to stay in touch with you. As new scientific information comes to light, we may well be in a position to ask you to give blood again.

If you would like to continue to receive regular copies of The Donor magazine please complete and return the reply form opposite.

If you have any questions please call:

0845 7 711 711 (24 hours)

or visit **www.blood.co.uk**

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There are two ways in which you can use this form.

Firstly, please use it to let us know if you're not sure that you have received blood since 1980. If this is the case, you may well be able to continue giving blood.

Secondly, please use it to let us know if you wish to continue to receive copies of The Donor. To return your form, please moisten, fold and seal. No stamp is required.

If you're not sure, let us know

☐ If you think that you may have received blood but are not sure, you may well be able to continue giving blood. Please let us know by ticking this box and completing and returning this form.

To stay in touch

☐ I would like to continue to receive regular copies of The Donor magazine.

Title _____ Forenames _____

Surname _____

Your Donor Number _____ Date of birth _____

(You can find this on your donor card or on the top of your letter)

Address _____

Postcode _____

Signature _____ Date _____



All information and data that is processed by the NBS is in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Please moisten, fold and return this form. No stamp is needed.

NATIONAL BLOOD SERVICE
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