

TESTING OF UK BLOOD DONORS FOR EVIDENCE OF TRANSFUSION-TRANSMISSIBLE INFECTIONS

All blood donors are routinely screened for evidence of infection with treponemes (the agents which cause syphilis and related diseases), hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and human T cell lymphotropic virus (HTLV).

Treponemal infection

Testing for evidence of treponemal infection was introduced in the National Blood Service (NBS) (then National Blood Transfusion Service) in the mid-1940s and has continued ever since.

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection

Testing for evidence of hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection was introduced in the NBS in the early 1970s. The test used is the hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) test and this has remained the only routine mandatory test for evidence of HBV infection. At the time of introduction, the blood service was managed on a regional basis and there was no uniform date for the introduction of such testing. The first centre introduced testing in early 1970, and it was universal for all blood donations by the end of 1971.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection

Testing for evidence of HIV infection was introduced throughout the NBS in mid-October 1985, so that all donations issued after 14 October 1985 were tested.

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection

Testing for evidence of HCV infection was introduced on 1 September 1991. All donations taken on or after that date were routinely tested for antibodies to HCV (anti-HCV). In addition, pilot studies of HCV testing had been introduced in some centres earlier in 1991 and that pilot testing continued until the official introduction date.

Testing for HCV genome (HCV Nucleic Acid Testing [NAT]) was introduced on a pilot basis in 1999 and became a routine mandatory test for all blood donations (except very short shelf life components) on 30 April 2001.

Human T cell lymphotropic virus (HTLV) infection

Testing for HTLV antibodies was phased in over the summer of 2002 and was universal for all blood donations from 29 September 2002.