

# Blood Transfusion

## Information and advice for patients who have received a blood transfusion

Most blood transfusions are uneventful, but complications can occur occasionally. This leaflet describes the most common complications and relevant actions you should take.

### Minor and moderate complications

#### Bleeding from the cannula site

When the nurse removes your intravenous cannula (a needle with a thin tube inserted into a vein), gentle pressure is applied and a dressing is put over the wound to reduce the risk of bleeding. This should be kept on overnight and removed the following morning. If the cannula site bleeds after leaving the ward, remove the soiled dressing and apply a clean wad of tissue or cotton wool over the wound and press it firmly. It may help to raise the arm and apply an ice pack (protect the skin by placing a clean towel between the ice pack and the skin). When the bleeding has stopped, apply a clean dressing or plaster. If the bleeding fails to stop, contact the department where you received the transfusion. If the unit is closed, contact **NHS 111 for advice (telephone 111)**.

#### Pain and swelling where the needle is inserted

Pain and swelling near the cannula site may be a sign of bruising. If this occurs, apply an ice pack and raise the arm. If you require further advice, please telephone the ward where you received your transfusion. They may arrange for you to return to the ward for further assessment or suggest you see your own General Practitioner (GP). If the problem occurs out of hours, contact **NHS 111**.

#### Redness and swelling or discharge around the cannula site

This may be a sign of infection. It is essential that you see your GP the same day because you may require antibiotics. If the problem occurs out of hours, contact **NHS 111**.

### Severe adverse reactions (very rare)

Transfusions can very occasionally result in serious complications. The symptoms to look out for include the following:

- Breathing problems or wheeziness
- Swelling of lips/face
- Fever (rise in temperature)
- Widespread red itchy rash or wheals
- Urinary/faecal incontinence
- Shivering/rigors (feeling very hot or cold)
- Passing blood in your urine
- Unexpected or unexplained bruising
- Chest pain or pain in the limbs, tummy or lower back
- Jaundice (yellow colour of the white of your eyes or skin)
- Extreme tiredness or generally feeling unwell

These reactions tend to occur within 24 hours of transfusion, but on occasions may be delayed by several days. **It is essential that you seek urgent medical advice** and inform the healthcare professional that you have had a blood (or blood product) transfusion. In the rare event of an emergency (life threatening problems, for example difficulty with breathing), **call 999 for an ambulance and inform them that you have had a blood transfusion.**

## Further information

### NHS Website

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/blood-transfusion/>

### NHS Blood and Transplant

- <https://www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/what-we-do/blood-services/blood-transfusion/transfusion-faqs/>

## Useful contact details

### East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust:

- Website [www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk)
- Telephone 01438 314333
- Contact the department where you received the transfusion or call NHS 111

### NHS 111:

This phoneline can help if you think you need medical help right now. NHS 111 can direct you to the best place to get help if you cannot contact your GP during the day, or when your GP is closed (out-of-hours). It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- Telephone 111

## Leaflet information

**You can request this information in a different format or another language; please speak to your doctor or nurse.**

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