

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET PLATELET TRANSFUSIONS

Platelet transfusions are produced from blood donations by the Australian Red Cross Blood Service (ARCBS). They are an important part of your treatment, used to prevent or control bleeding in people who have a low platelet count due to disease, chemotherapy or as a result of bleeding.

In general platelet transfusions are very safe. Donors of all blood products are screened and tested for viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis before any product is released for use, making the risk of these infections very low.

However there is still a small risk of bacterial infection of a platelet transfusion, in part because platelets need to be stored at room temperature. To reduce this risk ARCBS has implemented a screening process, as of April 2008, for all platelets.

This screening process monitors a specimen taken from the platelets for seven days observing for bacteria. Platelets need to be transfused within 5 days of collection therefore the results of these tests may not be available until after the platelets have been transfused. This testing is very sensitive meaning that it may appear that bacteria are present when later testing shows that there are no bacteria in the platelets.

The hospital will be told when these initial tests are positive and if the platelets have not been used they will be removed from stock and not transfused.

If the platelets have been transfused the doctor in charge of your treatment will be contacted and informed. They will then monitor you for any signs of infection and start treatment as soon as possible if appropriate.

Some patients will receive platelets as a day patient and return home after treatment. In this situation, if the screening test is positive you will receive a call from your doctor at home to check on your condition and to arrange follow up to ensure you do not experience any problems. This may occur at any time of the day or night.

It is always important that you immediately report any signs of infection (such as fever, chills or shakes or sweats) as soon as possible to your doctor in order to receive appropriate treatment.

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment or the information contained in this leaflet or if you have any other questions about the transfusion of any blood products, please speak to your nurse or doctor.