NHS
Blood and Transplant

**Information for patients**

# COVID-19 convalescent plasma therapy

## What is convalescent plasma?

Plasma is the liquid in blood that carries around the body:

- red cells which carry oxygen
- platelets that help the blood to clot, and
- white cells and antibodies to fight infection.

The cells and platelets can be separated from the plasma to produce the convalescent plasma blood component. Convalescent plasma is the name given to the antibody-rich plasma collected from people who have recovered from an infection. If it contains enough antibodies it may be used to help other patients. Once collected, the plasma is frozen and stored.

## What is it used for?

Convalescent plasma has been used in the treatment of other diseases where vaccines or other medicines are not available. The antibodies within the plasma overcome the virus, preventing its reproduction and stopping further tissue damage. Trials are now running, in the UK and around the world, to see if convalescent plasma treatment works in COVID-19.

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# Risks associated with plasma transfusions

**The risk that convalescent plasma will cause severe harm or death is very low; however, there are associated risks and problems that can occur, ranging from minor to severe. The risks fall into three main categories:**

## Errors and mistakes

There are many systems in place to make your transfusion as safe as possible. One of the most important steps is to make sure you get the right convalescent plasma component. To ensure this happens, staff carry out careful identification checks. Any blood samples taken must be labelled at your side. The details recorded on the sample tubes should be checked against your identification band, the request card, and by asking your name and date of birth.

Wearing an identification band is essential for all patients about to receive a convalescent plasma transfusion. Just before you receive the convalescent plasma you will be asked your name and date of birth again. This information will be checked against your identification band, the convalescent plasma bag and the prescription. Please remind the healthcare professional to ask you for this information if they do not do so.

## Reactions

As with all blood components, there is a remote chance that there are substances in your blood that may react with the convalescent plasma. There is also the possibility of a build-up of fluid in your circulation. These complications can cause symptoms such as: flushing, fever or chills, a rash/itching, or breathing difficulties. Severe reactions to blood transfusions are very rare but, if they do occur, staff are trained to recognise and treat them. It is important that you inform a member of staff if you develop any symptoms during or after receiving the plasma.

## Infection

Blood components are donated by healthy, unpaid volunteers and the risk of an infected unit getting into the UK blood supply continues to fall. Donors and blood donations are tested for a range of potential infections, including hepatitis B, C and E, and HIV. This makes the chance of transmitting any infection very low, but the risk can never be removed completely.

Although there is no evidence of transmission of the coronavirus from blood components such as plasma, there remains a very small chance that there may be virus present in the convalescent plasma.

# Concerns specific to you

**The medical/nursing team caring for you should discuss with you the risks and concerns of transfusion that are particularly important to you. This could include any religious, personal or health-based objections to blood transfusions that you may have.**

## How is a convalescent plasma transfusion given and how will I feel?

The plasma is thawed in the laboratory before being sent to the ward. It is given via a tube directly into a vein and most people do not feel anything unusual during the transfusion. In adults it takes around 30 minutes to transfuse a 300ml bag of plasma, the volume and rate may be different for children. You may be given more than one bag as part of your treatment.

## What if I have any worries or concerns about receiving a transfusion?

If you are worried or have any questions, please talk to the doctors or nurses caring for you. Many hospitals have a dedicated transfusion team and, if appropriate, they may be able to come and discuss your concerns with you.

During your treatment, a transfusion of red cells or other blood components, such as platelets, may also be required. If so, there are other patient information leaflets available from NHS Blood and Transplant, such as *'Will I need a blood transfusion?'*, that may help explain things for you. Please ask your doctor or nurse for a copy of any other leaflets relevant to you.

## Can I donate convalescent plasma after I recover?

Yes, you can donate convalescent plasma after recovery from COVID-19. You can donate even if you have had a transfusion of convalescent plasma.

However, you or anyone who has received any other blood component since 1980 are currently unable to donate whole blood or other blood components. You can find out more at **nhsbt.nhs.uk**

# Contact us

We would welcome your feedback and comments on this leaflet. You can contact us:

By post to:
**Customer Services, NHS Blood and Transplant**
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By email to: **nhsbt.customerservice@nhsbt.nhs.uk**

Or by phone: **01865 381010**

This leaflet was prepared by NHS Blood and Transplant in collaboration with the National Blood Transfusion Committee. Further supplies can be obtained by accessing https://hospital.nhsbtleaflets.co.uk

Individual copies of this leaflet can be obtained by calling 01865 381010.

### NHS Blood and Transplant

NHS Blood and Transplant is a joint England and Wales Special Health Authority. We provide the blood donation service for England and the organ donation service for the UK. We also provide donated tissues, stem cells and cord blood. We are an essential part of the NHS, saving and improving lives through public donation. NHS Blood and Transplant enables around 5,000 organ transplants a year in the UK and collects around 1.4 million units of blood each year to meet the needs of patients across England.

For more information, visit **nhsbt.nhs.uk**
Email **enquiries@nhsbt.nhs.uk**