



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Information for patients on the Infected Blood Inquiry

About Public Health England

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care, and a distinct delivery organisation with operational autonomy. We provide government, local government, the NHS, Parliament, industry and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific and delivery expertise and support.

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Why there is a government inquiry into infected blood and how it may affect me

The Infected Blood Inquiry (IBI) is examining why potentially infected blood transfusions and blood products were given to patients by the NHS in the 1970s and 1980s, the impact on their families, how the authorities responded and the care and support provided to those infected and their families, carers and loved ones (described by the IBI as the affected).

This inquiry will mainly focus on the transmission of hepatitis C and HIV before effective screening tests were available. The blood services began routinely screening donations for hepatitis B in 1972, screening for HIV in 1985 and screening for hepatitis C in 1991.

More information about the IBI is available at: <https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/>

What to do if you think you may have received blood in the 1970s and 1980s

Some patients will already have been contacted by the blood service as part of the 'lookback investigations' which began in the mid-1990s following introduction of HIV and hepatitis C screening. If you were not contacted but think you might be at risk, talk with your GP. If you received blood or blood products prior to 1992 please talk to your GP who can discuss your concerns and if necessary organise testing for hepatitis C and other infections. However, it is very unlikely that anyone who has HIV following blood transfusions in the 1970s and 1980s is not already diagnosed and aware of their infection.

What to do if you think you may have caught hepatitis C or HIV from a blood transfusion

If you are concerned that you may have caught an infection through blood transfusion talk to your GP. Your GP can check whether you have hepatitis C or HIV by arranging a simple blood test (if not already done).

If you have hepatitis C your GP can refer you to a hospital specialist team who can give you tablets that clear the infection in more than 90% of people. More information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hepatitis-c-patient-re-engagement-exercise>

If you have HIV your GP can arrange for referral for specialist care and treatment.

If you are still concerned that you may have received blood or blood products which were infected, please go to the IBI website to find information on what to do next at:

<https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/>

You will need to obtain a copy of your medical records from the hospital where your treatment took place before contacting the blood services. Hospitals record the reference numbers of any blood transfused which can then be used to track whether these units were screened for the presence of viruses. There is advice on how to obtain your medical records on the IBI website:

<https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/requesting-medical-evidence>

NHS Blood and Transplant, the English blood service, do not hold medical records or details of which patients have received transfusions. The blood services will only hold information if you have previously been a blood donor or if you have been contacted in the past as part of a transfusion investigation.

NHS Blood and Transplant can be contacted on: 0300 123 23 23

Safety of blood transfusions in the UK

Please do not be alarmed about receiving a blood transfusion. While no medical treatment can have zero risk for patients, the UK blood supply is one of the safest in the world.

All the UK Blood Services, including the English blood service, NHS Blood and Transplant, follow strict guidelines and testing to protect both donors and patients. The blood services are all subject to regular inspections by independent regulators.

All our blood donors are unpaid volunteers and they all complete an extensive donor health check questionnaire before each blood donation. All donors considered at risk of passing on an infection are asked to defer donating until it is safe for them to do so.

All donations are routinely tested for hepatitis B, hepatitis C, hepatitis E, HIV, syphilis and for first-time donors, human T-lymphotropic virus (HTLV), before they are released to hospitals. If any blood donation tests positive for infection, it is not released and therefore cannot be issued to a patient. The blood donor is given support and advice.

Where to seek advice if you need a blood transfusion

NHS Blood and Transplant provides information leaflets for patients about blood transfusion. While these do not replace the guidance provided by the doctors and nurses caring for you, they can help inform discussions about the benefits, risks and any suitable alternatives to blood transfusion. These leaflets are available here:

<https://nhsbtdbe.blob.core.windows.net/umbraco-assets-corp/2159/160511-27360-will-i-need-a-blood-transfusion-final.pdf>

Where to get more information about hepatitis C

The NHS website has information about hepatitis C, including recommendations on who should be tested. This is available at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Hepatitis-C/>

The Hepatitis C Trust is a national patient organisation staffed by people who have all had the disease and offers help and support free of charge. It can be contacted on 020 7089 6221 and its web address is:

<http://www.hepctrust.org.uk/>

The British Liver Trust can also help. Its telephone number is 0800 652 7330 and its web address is:

<https://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/>

Public Health England has also produced an FAQ and quick read leaflet on hepatitis C, which are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hepatitis-c-patient-re-engagement-exercise>

Where to get more information about HIV

The NHS website has information about HIV including advice on who is at risk and should be tested and where to get tested. This is available at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hiv-and-aids/>

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<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hiv-and-aids/>