



## Refusing blood products during pregnancy

### What are blood products?

Blood products are derived from blood donations. Separating whole blood into its individual components means that patients can be given what they need, for example red blood cells or platelets.

- Red blood cells contain haemoglobin. Haemoglobin is a molecule which requires iron to carry oxygen and remove carbon dioxide from the tissues. Optimising haemoglobin levels is especially important during pregnancy. Iron supplementation is typically required and, in some cases, red blood cell transfusion.
- Platelets clump together allowing blood to clot after injury. They can be useful in emergency situations to stop bleeding.
- Plasma is the liquid component of blood. It contains many proteins and substances, such as clotting factors and immunoglobulins. Clotting factors can be used to treat disorders where blood does not clot correctly. Immunoglobulins help protect against infection and are a marker of immune system activity.

### Can anyone refuse a blood transfusion?

Yes. At Great Western hospital we aim to respect our patients religious, cultural, ethical and personal beliefs. This means that we give women the opportunity to make an informed decision about the blood components which they are willing to receive. Before giving anyone blood products, the risks and benefits of receiving the products versus not receiving the products will be discussed.

If you are a Jehovah's witness, your minister as well as Great Western hospital's Jehovah's witness liaison service can be a great source of support.

### What happens if I am planning a pregnancy?

Before conceiving your next pregnancy, you can seek advice from your General Practitioner (GP) about how we care for you during pregnancy and how to become as fit as possible prior to pregnancy. If you wish, your General



## Refusing blood products during pregnancy

Practitioner (GP) can refer you for a consultation with a member of the obstetric team.

### What happens if I am pregnant?

When registering with your community midwife, please tell us if you are not willing to receive blood products. You will then be referred to a consultant obstetrician who will be providing your maternity care.

If you are a Jehovah's witness you may have an 'Advanced Decision to Refuse Specialist Medical Treatment directive', also known as a 'No blood' form, please bring this with you to your consultant appointment. Alternatively, we will complete a detailed document which clearly states which blood products you would be willing to accept. Copies of these documents will be filed in your maternity notes.

### During your consultant antenatal appointment, we will discuss...

- The risks and benefits of declining blood or blood products.
- The need to monitor haemoglobin levels throughout the pregnancy. If haemoglobin levels remain low, despite iron and folic acid tablets, iron infusion may need to be given into a vein. This means spending a day in hospital.
- You will be referred for an anaesthetic review.
- Your plan for delivery, including steps we can take to reduce the risk of bleeding. If you require a caesarean section, we can discuss cell salvage techniques.
- If you have a Rhesus negative blood group and your baby's blood group is Rhesus positive, we will recommend having anti-D injections throughout your pregnancy. Anti-D injections are derived from blood products. Refusing anti-D injection during pregnancy can have serious adverse effects on pregnancies in the future.

### What happens during labour?

You will be advised to deliver in a consultant led unit (such as the Delivery Suite in Great Western Hospital) as opposed to a birthing centre or home birth.



## Refusing blood products during pregnancy

When you arrive on the Delivery Suite, both the consultant obstetrician and anaesthetist will be made aware. You will be looked after normally during your labour. We may advise placing a small tube into your vein (cannula) so that we can give medications quickly if there is any bleeding. We will also recommend receiving an injection which helps with the delivery of the placenta (active management of the third stage of labour).

Throughout your labour, you can be confident that your wishes will be respected. Even if an emergency were to arise, you will be cared for in the safest way possible, in accordance with your wishes.

### What happens after delivery?

After delivery, you will be monitored for a short period of time on the Delivery Suite. Once your blood loss is stable, you will be transferred to the post-natal ward. Here, you will have a blood test to check your haemoglobin level and iron tablets will be prescribed for you to continue at home if needed.

### What if I have further questions?

If you have any further questions that are not answered by this leaflet please discuss them with a member of your obstetric team.

Further help is available for Jehovah's Witnesses from:

- Your minister
- Great Western hospital's Jehovah's witness liaison service. The team can be contacted through the hospital information services on **020 8371 3415** or **HIS@jw.org**.

From 1st January 2019 smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

**This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email [gwh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:gwh.pals@nhs.net).**

#### Document Control

Division: Women and Children's  
Department: Maternity  
Approved Date: 6 November 2019  
Next Review Date: December 2022  
Document Number: W&C - PIL0093