

Patient Fact Sheet

Special Blood Requirement - Irradiated Blood

What is irradiated blood?

Irradiation of donated blood reduces the activity of the white blood cells (WBCs) in it. Irradiation does not make the blood less beneficial to you. The blood does not become 'radioactive' and will not harm you or anyone around you.

Why is irradiated blood needed?

Irradiated blood is given to prevent a rare but serious transfusion side effect called transfusion-associated graft-versus-host disease (TA-GvHD). TA-GvHD is caused by the activity of the WBCs in the donated blood and can cause severe illness in certain patients at risk.

Patients at risk for TA-GvHD include those:

- with certain immune system disorders
- who have received treatment with certain drugs (for example fludarabine)
- who have received bone marrow/stem cell transplantation
- who receive blood from a close relative or blood matched for Human Leukocyte Antigen

Is all blood routinely irradiated?

Red blood cells and platelets irradiated 'on demand' only. It is important that you tell your medical team if you have been told that you should receive irradiated blood.

What if blood is needed in an emergency?

In an emergency, there may not be enough time to arrange for irradiated blood to be provided. It may be more important to provide blood quickly. The medical team treating you will balance these risks and discuss with you.

- ✓ Please carry the attached card with you and show it to your physician or nurse if a blood transfusion is being considered.
- ✓ Consider registering with a medical alert program (such as MedicAlert® or an equivalent program) to help first responders and emergency physicians in identifying your need for irradiated blood components.