

Important Information for Female Platelet Donors

We are grateful for the support you provide our community blood program and especially appreciate your willingness to help save lives as a volunteer platelet donor. We also take our responsibility to provide a safe and adequate blood supply very seriously and need to share the following information regarding a change to our donor eligibility criteria for female platelet donors.

We recently began performing a Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) antibody test on each of our current female platelet donors who have ever been pregnant. In addition, we modified our Medical History Questionnaire to ask donors whether they have been pregnant since their last donation. Platelet donors who respond yes to that question will be screened for HLA antibodies. Platelet donors will also be retested after every subsequent pregnancy.

These adjustments are being made as part of our effort to reduce occurrences of Transfusion-Related Acute Lung Injury (TRALI). TRALI is a rare but serious complication of blood transfusions most commonly thought to be caused by a reaction to HLA antibodies present in the donor's plasma. When transfused, these antibodies can sometimes cause plasma to leak into the patient's lungs, creating fluid accumulation — a condition referred to as acute pulmonary edema.

Female donors who have been pregnant are more likely than others to have these HLA antibodies in their plasma. Once the antibodies develop, they are present forever. The antibodies could be harmful if transfused into certain patients. The antibodies are present in plasma — and platelet donations contain a high volume of plasma, so our current efforts are directed at screening blood samples from female platelet donors to test for the HLA antibody.

As we phase in HLA antibody screening, we will review the eligibility for platelet donors with pregnancy history. We will notify donors of positive results by a phone call and a follow-up letter. If you test positive for these antibodies, you are no longer eligible for platelet and plasma donations. However, we strongly encourage you to continue giving back to the community by donating whole blood or red cells, which are just as important to patients at the hospitals we serve.

We are committed to providing the highest quality products and services to recipients and donors. We welcome your comments and questions regarding our HLA antibody test, and will make every effort to keep you informed of any future developments that may affect you.

Rock River Valley

BLOOD CENTER

Straight From the Heart



What does HLA Mean? Human Leukocyte Antigen. The antibody to HLA most often occurs in donors who have previously been pregnant, and can be found in plasma, and platelet products. Women, however, do not always become HLA antibody positive in pregnancy.

Will I test positive for the HLA antibody if I have been pregnant? Not always. We encourage you to continue donating platelets, allowing us the opportunity to perform HLA testing from your donation.

Why is testing for the HLA antibody important? Being accredited by AABB (formerly the American Association of Blood Banks), we look to them for the most up to date donor and patient safety guidance. AABB has deemed HLA antibody testing is necessary to provide the safest platelet and plasma products to patients, helping to reduce further the risk for transfusion-related complications.

Does the test require any additional blood? Performing this test does not require any extra time or an additional needle stick. There will be enough left from your regular donation to perform this test.

When will I be tested? We have begun testing female platelet donors who answer yes to our pregnancy questions during the health history process. You could be tested today, or at a later donation date. We will test 100% of our female platelet donors who answer yes to the pregnancy question no later than October 2016.

Will you notify me of my HLA testing result? If you test positive for the HLA antibody, you will be notified. You will be contacted by a member of our medical office via phone call and mail. You will not receive any notification of a negative result, and are urged to continue donating platelets.

Is it harmful to me to have this antibody? Having an HLA antibody poses no risk to you. The potential risk lies in the patient who receives platelets or plasma from a donor with an HLA antibody.

I have been donating for years; could I have caused a complication in a patient? Complications or transfusion reactions are rare. Please rest assured that you would have been notified if there had been a transfusion reaction in any patient who received one of your blood products.

Why is the Blood Center making this change now? The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is instituting a new requirement that all female platelet apheresis and plasma donors must be tested as HLA antibody negative as of October 2016. This is being done as an additional safeguard and is hoped to further reduce the rate of TRALI incidents.

I tested positive for the HLA antibody. I have been donating platelets for years. I have never been notified of any transfusion reaction from my donated blood products. Why can't I continue to donate platelets? Although serious transfusion reactions are rare, the possibility is still present. We, along with AABB, believe it is our responsibility to provide the safest possible blood product to our community.

I tested HLA positive; can I ever donate again? Though you cannot donate platelets or plasma, we strongly encourage you to continue donating whole blood or double red cells, with RRVBC. The red cells prepared from your donation contain very little plasma, so you can continue to help patients in need.

For more information, please contact our Donor Care Advocate/Quality Assurance Department at 815-965-8751.

