

COVID-19 Convalescent Plasma and COVID-19 Immunoglobulin - Donor Information Sheet

Thank you for considering donating blood to help treat patients with novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

As someone who has recently recovered from COVID-19 you're in the unique position to help others with this very serious disease.

What are the criteria to donate plasma?

To be considered eligible a person must have had laboratory confirmed COVID-19 confirmed in Australia, have recovered for at least 4 weeks and must meet our usual eligibility requirements.

How might my blood help?

Treatment of COVID-19 is difficult. However, one experimental treatment is to give patients a transfusion of plasma collected from the blood of people who have recovered from COVID-19 (called convalescent plasma). Whilst studies to date have shown that convalescent plasma does not improve people when they are so sick they are admitted to hospital, trials are still determining whether there may be other uses such as in people whose immune system is significantly suppressed.

This is because people who have recovered from COVID-19 have special proteins (antibodies) in the plasma part of their blood. Your body produced these antibodies to fight the disease. They stay in your blood and may protect you against COVID-19 in future.

Another potential therapy is to use convalescent plasma to manufacture COVID-19 Immunoglobulin which is a concentrate of antibodies.

We don't know yet if giving patients convalescent plasma or COVID-19 Immunoglobulin is an effective treatment for COVID-19 in some circumstances. However, we do know that some subgroups of patients have recovered from infections following a convalescent plasma transfusion and some studies have suggested potential benefit. It is thought that the antibodies in convalescent plasma may help patients fight the disease and recover more quickly.

Australian Red Cross Lifeblood (Lifeblood) is collecting blood from people who have recovered from COVID-19 so that it can be used as convalescent plasma for either direct transfusion or for manufacture of COVID-19 Immunoglobulin to treat patients with active COVID-19 infection.

This involves people who have recovered from COVID-19 giving blood donations.

What will happen if I agreed to give blood?

There is no payment or reward for your blood donation. You could think of it as a gift to another person, one which may save their life.

Blood donation

If you wish to donate blood and are able to, Lifeblood will organise an appointment at a blood donation centre. Before your appointment you should eat a meal and drink at least 3 glasses of fluids.

At your appointment:

1. The first thing that will happen is you will be screened by our donor wellness check. You will be asked if you have recently been diagnosed with COVID-19. When you answer 'yes' and if you are healthy and well and pass our temperature screening, our staff will have flagged you as a special donor that can donate convalescent plasma or hyperimmune globulin.
2. You'll then check in at reception and be given a questionnaire to complete.
3. Once you've finished the questionnaire, a trained staff member will take you to a private room to go through it and answer any questions you have.
4. If you've been cleared for blood donation, a staff member will check the veins in your arm and confirm your donation type as plasma or whole blood. It is better if you can donate plasma as that is the portion of the blood that can be used to help sick patients. However, we can also collect a smaller amount of plasma as a whole blood donation.
 - a) Whole blood donation

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During the donation, a trained staff member will clean the inner area of your elbow and insert a sterile needle, attached to a bag. The donation itself takes around 10 minutes and you'll donate approximately 470 mL. The plasma part of your blood will be separated out later to use as convalescent plasma for COVID-19 patients.

b) Plasma donation

Apheresis is a process used to collect only plasma from your blood. When you donate plasma by apheresis, a cell separating machine draws blood from your arm through a sterile tube, separates out and collects the plasma, and returns the red cells back to you. Your blood is mixed with anticoagulant to prevent it from clotting. The process is repeated 4-5 times until enough plasma is collected (usually around 750 mL) and takes between 45 minutes and 1 hour. Following this process, you will be given an infusion of saline (a salt solution) for fluid replacement.

5. After both types of donation, the needle is removed, the needle site is covered, and you are taken to the refreshment area to have a snack and drink before you leave.

In the 12 hours following your donation we recommend you don't operate heavy machinery or perform strenuous exercise. Your body should restore the lost blood volume in about 36 hours.

Testing

All blood donations are routinely tested for blood group, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis C (HCV) and hepatitis B (HBV). Human T-lymphotropic virus (HTLV) and syphilis are tested on all first-time donors, and subsequently all donations are tested for syphilis unless they are collected exclusively for plasma for fractionation.

In addition to routine tests performed on all blood donors, your sample will be tested for antibodies to COVID-19. Some individuals with confirmed COVID-19 will not have detectable antibodies, either because the body cleared the virus whilst it was still in the respiratory tract or because the antibody test that we are using is only detecting those with specific antibodies at a high level.

The test may take a few weeks to have a final result. The plasma will be held in storage until the test for antibodies is completed. If the donation does not have sufficient antibody, it will be used for other patients in need. The antibody testing is for research purposes only and should not be used for your own health assessment. If you are continuing to donate for convalescent plasma and we find you do not have sufficient antibody, we will let you know as soon as we have the results of this test. This is to let you know that your plasma is not suitable as convalescent plasma. However, your donations will still be used as standard plasma donations and we encourage you to continue donating.

Possible discomfort and risks

Occasionally, some people feel light-headed or dizzy after donating. Sometimes there might be bruising, mild pain and/or discomfort around the inner elbow. In very rare circumstances, donating can be associated with infection or inflammation of the vein. Donating plasma by apheresis has some additional uncommon risks associated with it. These risks will be explained to you if you're eligible to donate this way. Donors who have recovered from COVID-19 are able to donate plasma weekly for up to 12 donations and then up to fortnightly thereafter. While this is more frequent than the fortnightly interval for our usual plasma donations, it is considered safe with no significant increase in risk for donors. As a precaution, we will do additional testing to ensure your immunoglobulin levels in your blood do not become low.

What happens to my blood donation?

Your blood donation won't have your name on it. If you donate whole blood, the plasma is separated, and the other cells will be transfused to patients in need. For plasma, we freeze and store it until needed. Plasma with sufficient antibody will be separated from either whole blood donations or from apheresis plasma donations and will predominantly be used for manufacture of COVID-19 Immunoglobulin. Some plasma with higher antibody levels may be used for direct transfusion to patients with COVID-19. If there is not sufficient antibody your plasma will be used for other patients in need or manufactured into other life-saving products.

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Confidentiality

All information you provide to Lifeblood, including the consent form and your test results, will be confidential. Information may be passed to relevant health professionals and bodies in the health sector, but only in a de-identified way, i.e. your identity will not be passed on and you will not be identifiable from the information provided. A copy of Lifeblood's privacy policy is available at www.lifeblood.com.au.

Will the person who receives the plasma be told who has provided it?

No. To protect your privacy, the plasma you donate will be labelled with a donation number, not your name. Lifeblood will not reveal your name or details to anyone. The plasma you donate will be treated with respect and be given to a patient who needs it. All information about you and your donation will remain confidential.

Will I be advised who receives my plasma?

No. The details of the patient who receives your blood is also confidential.

Expenses and payments

There is no cost to you related to the donation, and no payment to you for participating.

Participation and withdrawal from donations

You are free to decide whether or not you would like to donate. If Lifeblood believes donating blood poses a risk to either your health or that of the potential recipient, you won't be able to make a donation.

Once your donation has been collected, you can request for it to be withdrawn at any time, which can occur only if it has not been transfused or further processed into COVID-19 Immunoglobulin. Any request to withdraw your donation will not affect your future care or dealings with Lifeblood.

Where can I find out more information about eligibility and general blood donation?

You can find out more information by visiting <https://www.donateblood.com.au/learn#how-donation-works>. Before you proceed further you can also take our eligibility quiz to see if you are eligible to donate blood including convalescent plasma. If you are eligible and want to help please contact us as below.

I want to help, what should I do next?

Please call 13 14 95 and let our staff member know that you have recently recovered from COVID-19. They will ask you a few questions and help you book your appointment.