

Donor Eligibility Information

The Process and Risks of Blood Donation

Thank you for volunteering to be a blood donor today. The donation process is actually quite simple and takes less than an hour. Starting with a picture ID, your name and other demographic data is entered into a computer. Next, you will answer a series of questions about your health, travel, and high-risk behavior. After that you will go in a private room with one of our staff to go over the questions. You will have a brief physical that includes your temperature, pulse, blood pressure and iron check known as a hemoglobin test. The hemoglobin test is non-invasive and uses a light and gentle squeeze of the thumb. Then you finally get to donate your blood and save the life of someone that you do not know. Congratulations!

The blood donation process is very safe. With sterile one time use supplies donors cannot contract a disease from blood donation. **However, blood donation procedures are not free of some risk.** Though usually minor, there can sometimes be donor reactions to blood loss or other complications.

Donor reactions to blood donation have been studied by many different organizations and each has its own rate of reaction. One of the most recent studies was done by the American Red Cross (ARC). The ARC study reported that the overall rate of donor reactions was 3.8% of all blood donations. They further broke down the donors into age groups as seen on the table below:

Donor Age in Years	% of Donations with Complications
16-17*	10.7
18-19*	8.3
20 +	2.8

* The vasovagal reaction accounts for majority of the donor reactions in the 16-19 year-olds.

There are different kinds of donor reactions. The most common ones are the vasovagal, bruise and allergic reactions. The very infrequent ones are the nerve injuries and infections which are generally less than 0.001% of donations. For donors giving on automated collection machines, citrate toxicity is the most common reaction. The following list outlines the different donor reactions with the signs and symptoms one may experience. Included with the signs and symptoms are some after care instructions should you experience a reaction. Reactions can be delayed and occur 6-8 hours post donation.

If you experience a reaction after leaving the donation site, you may call the blood bank to report the reaction and receive additional assistance.

Reaction Type	Signs and Symptoms	After Care Instructions
Vasovagal reaction 	Weakness, lightheadedness, paleness, cold skin and sweating. More severe include loss of consciousness with or without injury, nausea and tetany (muscular tightening).	Application of cold compress to forehead with reclining of the donor to a position where the legs are above the head.
Hematoma or bruise 	Accumulation of blood within the soft tissue at and around the donation site. It may take several weeks for the color and pain to be resolved.	Large hematomas should have ice applied to the donation site within the first 24 hours followed by heat application after 24 hours. Hematomas will dissipate over time and may be painful as they heal.
Localized allergic reactions 	Skin reactions either to the antiseptic (chlorhexidine or iodine) or tape. Red, itchy and/or bumpy rash is distributed in the location of the bandage or the arm preparation.	Use antihistamines and/or over-the-counter topical steroids for itching. To prevent future skin reactions ask the staff to use an alternative antiseptic or bandage.
Citrate toxicity 	Mild symptom is the tingling of fingers and mouth. Severe symptoms include chills, nausea, muscle cramps or tetany (muscular tightening).	Calcium-rich foods in advance can help lessen citrate reactions. During the apheresis procedure calcium antacids can be given for tingling. A blanket/heat pad is used to keep donors warm. The procedure can be modified to mitigate the citrate reaction.
Neural (nerve) injury 	Characterized by pain, numbness along the arm and weakness.	Treatment is time and over the counter non-aspirin pain relievers. Severe cases may require medical evaluation.
Infection 	Infection at the phlebotomy site. Phlebitis is inflammation of vessels and recognized by red streaks that follow vessels. Cellulitis is inflammation of the skin and is recognized by redness of the skin that spreads.	These rare complications require medical evaluation.