

# Information for Cancer Patients who need Irradiated Blood

Your doctor has asked that you receive irradiated blood for your blood transfusions. This information is now on your cancer care medical record but for your safety, it's important to wear medical alert identification, such as MedicAlert bracelets/pendants, engraved with "Irradiated Blood Products Only." You can order one by filling out a MedicAlert pamphlet order form, visiting the webpage [medicalert.ca/save](http://medicalert.ca/save) or calling 1-800-668-1507.



## What is irradiated blood?

It is blood that is treated with low dose radiation. The radiation stops a type of white blood cell (lymphocyte) in donated blood from harming you if you have a low immune system.

## Does irradiation damage the blood?

Irradiation does not cause any major damage. The blood **does not** become 'radioactive' and will not harm you or anyone around you. It only stops white blood cells in the donated blood from causing you harm.

## Why do I need irradiated blood?

You are at risk for developing **transfusion-associated graft-versus-host disease** (TA-GvHD). Irradiated blood can stop you from getting this disease.

## What is TA-GvHD?

TA-GvHD is **very rare** but it is a very serious disease.

TA-GvHD can happen during a blood transfusion if you do not get irradiated blood. Always ask if the blood you are receiving is irradiated before it is transfused.

## Is all blood irradiated?

No. Blood is only irradiated for patients at risk of TA-GvHD. Your healthcare team must order it specially for you.

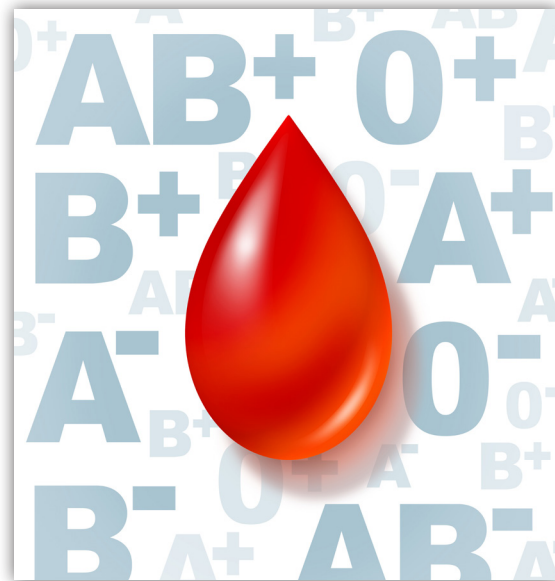
Even though your cancer care medical record will show that you need irradiated blood, it's important to wear your MedicAlert Identification so other medical centres or hospitals will know. If we work together, we can all make sure that you get the best care possible.



## What puts me at higher risk of getting TA-GvHD?

You are at higher risk if:

- You are being treated with certain drugs:
  - ATG (anti-thymocyte globulin)
  - Alemtuzumab
  - Bendamustine
  - Busulfan
  - Cladribine
  - Clofarabine
  - Cyclophosphamide (high-dose only)
  - Deoxycoformicin
  - Fludarabine
  - Pentostatin
- You had a stem cell transplant\*
- Your doctor feels you may be at risk for TA-GvHD
- You have been diagnosed with Aplastic Anemia or Hodgkin's Lymphoma



**If any of the above applies to you, you should get irradiated blood products for life.**

\*Autologous transplant patients may only need irradiated products for 1 year after transplant. Please talk to your doctor.

## What if I have an emergency and I need blood?

There may not be enough time to get irradiated blood in an emergency. Sometimes, it's more important to give the blood quickly.

The risk of getting TA-GvHD is **very small**. In these emergency situations, the doctor treating you will look at the risks before making a decision.

**If you have any other questions, talk with your doctor or healthcare provider.**



Use this space to write the contact information for your nurse, doctor, clinic or centre.