Antibodies

What are antibodies?

Antibodies are important molecules our immune system makes to help protect ourselves against foreign things such as bacteria and viruses. Antibodies can also be formed in response to different blood groups.

How do I get antibodies?

Everyone is born with some antibodies. New blood group antibodies can be made in response to substances in nature that have similar structures to blood groups but are more likely to occur during pregnancy and or from exposure to blood through transfusions.

When would I be tested for blood group antibodies?

If you donate blood, some antibodies may be detected during routine testing, in which case you will be notified. You will also be tested if your doctor indicates that blood or blood products may be required as part of your medical treatment.

How will I be tested?

It is a simple blood test taken from a vein in your arm.

I have antibodies, what does this mean?

Having antibodies does not affect your general health. They become more important if you were to become pregnant or require a blood transfusion. Not all antibodies are equal in importance in a transfusion situation.

By knowing which antibodies you have, it allows laboratory staff to carefully match (or cross-match) your blood with donor blood to select the appropriate blood for your transfusion. This reduces the chance of a transfusion reaction occurring as a result of these antibodies.

Who do I need to tell?

It is important to let your general practitioner and family know if you have antibodies in case of an emergency situation. You should also let your doctor/ anaesthetist know before surgery so there is time to cross-match your blood with suitable blood for transfusion. A record of your transfusion history is kept by the laboratory that tests and matches your blood. It is useful if you know which laboratory has tested your blood previously as the current laboratory may need to contact them.

Why is my blood cross-matched before a transfusion?

If your blood has not been cross-matched prior to transfusion your antibodies can react to the antigens in the blood you receive. Antigens are substances which our immune system recognises as foreign and attempts to destroy with an antibody. This can cause a severe reaction known as a haemolytic reaction where the red cells being transfused are incompatible with your red cells and are destroyed. In severe cases this reaction can be fatal.

USE THE ANTIBODY CARD BELOW TO RECORD ANY KNOWN DETAILS YOU MAY HAVE/KNOW.

ANTIBODY CARD

Name:

_____

I have previously tested positive for antibodies

My blood was cross-matched by this provider:

_____

Telephone number:

_____

My Doctor is:

_____