

Thalassaemia - Frequently Asked Questions

What is Thalassaemia?

- **Thalassaemia is a group of inherited blood disorders where the haemoglobin in the blood is abnormal.** The abnormality means that the affected red blood cells are unable to function normally, which leads to anaemia.
- Thalassaemia mainly affects people with a South Asian, Arab or Mediterranean heritage. It is estimated that 1,000 people in the UK have Thalassaemia. These patients need regular blood transfusions, for life, to stay alive and benefit from donations from blood donors from a similar ethnic background.

Can people with Thalassaemia donate?

Unfortunately no, it is not possible for Thalassaemia sufferers to donate blood. However we would encourage patients to encourage members of the families and friend circles to donate on their behalf!

Do you test me for Thalassaemia when I donate blood?

If you do have Thalassaemia then it would have been diagnosed before you were 17 – the minimum age limit for blood donation. NHSBT do not test for Thalassaemia trait.

What other tests do you do?

As well as testing the blood for infections, NHSBT also tests your blood group for groups other than ABO. Some blood types are only found within South Asian/Arab heritage, for example Bombay type in the South Asian community. Rare blood is essential to help us provide compatible blood for patients with these rarer blood types.

Do you need blood from the South Asian / Arab Communities.

Yes, it is really important that more members of the South Asian/Arab communities step forward to become blood donors, as we do not have enough.

Why is it important for Thalassaemia patients to get blood from the same

community? Thalassaemia patients directly benefit from receiving blood which is as matched as possible, and this is achieved by using blood from a similar ethnic background. It is blood from the community, for the community.

Does one blood donation go straight to the patient?

No, as well as undertaking the tests on the blood (blood within the NHS is the safest in the world) the blood is also split into its component parts – red cells, platelets and plasma. As such, each blood donation can save or improve the lives of up to 3 adults or 6 infants.